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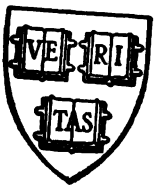

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THE WHISTLING MAID, A ROMANCE

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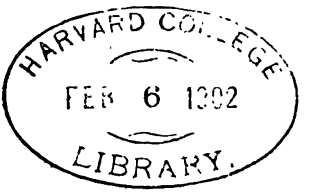

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HAZELL, WATSON, AND VINEY, LD.,
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THE WHISTLING MAID

CHAPTER I

LUNED AND GRINGOLET

THE cool shade of the early May morning still lay about the old house in Rhôs as Luned passed through the courtyard, a slender figure in a green kirtle. She had a boy's leather cap set lightly upon her head, which, as if she had not had time to attend fully to it before, she now pressed closer on her locks of yellow-brown hair. Round her neck was a narrow ribbon, from which hung a silver whistle. In one hand she had a twisted thong, in the other a hazel switch; and her kirtle was closely girdled with an old leathern belt. When she neared the wicket in the high wall at the foot of the yard, her step quickened itself to a run in her eagerness.

As the quiet yard and empty stables showed, the men were away with their master; but she was afraid of being called back by one of the maids. She

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reached the wicket safely, however, and without waiting to let down the crazy ladder used to descend to the ground below, she drew the wicket to behind her, and, full of the sense of escape, one hand on the wall, lightly leapt down. A tall bed of rank nettles grew there, with but one narrow track leading through them into the grove of mountain oaks beyond. Standing under the wall she paused, and blew upon her silver pipe, which had three stops, two long, clear notes, ere picking her way through the nettles, drenched with last night's rain. On reaching a little space of clean turf, she stopped and piped again the same two notes, plaintive and penetrating. In reply, a sound of light hoofs was heard from amid the trees, where one or two rough tracks, such as forest ponies make, could be traced in the brambles and underwood.

It was no forest pony that came. Instead, a small chestnut horse, a true Arâb, his coat of ruddiest dark chestnut, came cantering out of the trees. He never so much as paused till he was come within a couple of paces or so from her feet, when he stopped dead, dropping his head, till his long red mane, streaked with a few silver hairs, fell over his bright eyes. But as her hand was about to touch him he started, threw up his head again and darted off along the border of the trees at a hand-gallop, his tail waving to and fro, his hoofs scattering the plashy rain-pools in a fine spray. He had not gone far, however, when he wheeled about and came back.

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Luned, knowing his ways, stood stripping a thin ribbon of bark from her switch, until he came now and fairly thrust his nose into her hands. Whereupon, in a trice she slipped the rough bridle over his head, and gathering her skirts, sprang upon his bare back.

"Oh, Gringolet," she cried with a laugh of delight, "they are all asleep!" And Gringolet, who understood her perfectly, set off, at a walk, a trot, a gallop.

They galloped down to the low waterside where the river hurried, brown and noisy, after last night's rain; and there the rising sun met them, and led Luned to turn her head and watch its golden rim top the trees. And then it was she caught a distant echo of other hoofs, as of many horses galloping fast over some stony place far away, followed by a distant halloo. She thought little of it, sharing with Gringolet the full sense of the cool turf, the green leaves, the call of a cuckoo in the wood, and the half grumbling sound of the Sarthi and its noisy brown water.

But when they had attempted the ford, in spite of the flood water tumbling over the big boulders below it, and spent some time at the waterside, a voice that came from a neighbouring clump of hazels startled Luned. The voice was sharp and shrill, and sounded as if the caller were breathless with running. She rode Gringolet at once towards the hazels, whose lower branches were tangled with the dead drift of grass and twigs from some February flood. As she

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drew near, Gringolet snorted uneasily, and she caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a black hare slipping into its covert. Another moment, and a more palpable form rose from the river-bank under the hazel bushes—an old woman, who must have been crouching there.

"Malen?" cried Luned, astonished.

Malen was out of breath, she saw. One hand was at the old woman's side; the other held a bundle of clothes, strung together with a lace, which she now let slide to the grass. She held up this hand as if to beg a moment in which to recover breath. Evidently she was not merely sent from the house to recall the Maid of Rhôs, who had escaped her task of early spinning to ride out and play truant. And indeed, Malen, though a familiar spirit at Rhôs, was not an inmate of the house. Her own cot was at the waterside, a mile above, whence she went journeying all the country over, selling pins and charms, doing good turns and getting an evil name for them.

"Malen," said Luned again, "what is the matter, old heart?"

Malen lifted her hand, with reverted thumb, so that a torn black sleeve, like a daw's broken wing, drooped from her arm. Her thumb pointed to the house, whence Luned heard distinctly a confused hubbub —the shouting of men, the starting and rending of trees.

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Then Malen gasped out one word, "How—Howel Farf!" and, still short of breath, by way of further reply, picked up the bundle of clothes by its strap, undid it, and held up a grey tunic, and the long purple hose, vest, and sleeved under-jacket of a boy's costume.

Luned, with lips parted, and eyes growing wider as they looked from the boy's clothes to the tunic, hesitated, and finally slipped off Gringolet's back.

"Howel?" she questioned. The name of Howel, her mother's half-brother (nicknamed "Howel Farf," because of his notorious black beard), was of ill omen at Rhôs.

Malen nodded. "Twenty of him, all round the house, thrusting at the doors, and crying out for Rob, Rob the Red."

This name, coupled with Howel's, sent a stream of terrors flowing through Luned's imagination. Robart Goch, or Rob the Red, was as fervent a ruffian as lived in the whole countryside. More may be told of him another day. Enough now, that he had killed one of Howel's Redhands, and fled for protection to Rhôs. This was before Luned's coming home last winter from St. Brieux. In fact, she knew nothing of it, and though Howel's name was ominous, flat perplexity seized upon her as she pointed again to the clothes.

"But,—Malen, boy's things—tunic and hose—what are they for?"

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"For you, my dear. You must put them on, my bird," said Malen.

Luned's eyes grew wider—enlarged to their extremes of blue and white. "Put on boy's hose?"

"Ay," continued Malen, "you must ride after my master, Rhosser, your blesséd father, and wear them—hose and coat and chewnic. You must don them, wear them, save Rhôs in them."

"But I must go back and say good-bye to mother, my dear little moth', first. Good Malen, truly I must."

"Honey, you can't, you can't, indeed. I heard ye pipe for the little nag there in the wood awhile ago. Now, you must even play Jack, the whistling lad, and ride after my noble master, whom Mari keep, and bring safe home."

Malen's black sparks of eyes blinked as she spoke. She paused for breath, but her lips still twitched with excitement, and her grey locks fell in sparse threads about her eyebrows, while, seizing the grey tunic, she held it up, as if to point her tale with it.

The tunic was of soft grey Caermarthen cloth, embroidered with silver thread, worked into small stars on its short shoulder sleeves and borders. It was lined with crimson silk, and edged with grey fur. Very radiant it looked in the slant early sunlight, and upon it Luned's eyes gazed, growing wider, as Malen continued:

"I said to your mother, 'Sweet lady,' I said, 'that

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I knew when a babe, your brother will not touch Malen. Na,' I said, 'my lord Beard durst not touch Malen. I'll take clothes and chewnic to the little maid. Ay, ay!' And she took it out and gave me hose and the crimson undercoat with it; and you must put 'em on and ride and find your father, and bring him back, and save Rhôs and my sweet lady, your mother, from your black uncle, and his fiends and devils—and fiends, and devils and fiends!"

Her voice rose towards the end of this till it became a scream; her eyes closed till they were only like two wrinkles of rage.

"Did they hurt thee?" asked Luned, half thinking of Malen, half of the news she had brought, and shivering a little as she looked at the boy's clothes and the tunic.

Malen recovered her ordinary mood, and for reply laughed an evil-sounding, edged laugh, as she pointed over Luned's shoulder to a grove of oaks and birches below the ford. "There you must 'tire your limbs and lose your yellow locks'!" she said, producing an enormous pair of scissors, almost as large as sheep-shears. "Would I had Howel's weasand between 'em!" she said, snapping them.

Luned was frightened at such a breaking out of passion. Malen threw the tunic across Gringolet's back, with a fierce "c'lk!" and Luned, wondering and fearing, led him along to the lower trees.

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Before now, she had often wished she could be a boy. She did not know till this moment how much she loved her girl's long yellow-brown locks.

There, while the May morning was still young, and the sunbeams shot almost level through the half-leafed oaks, Malen's wrinkled brown hands rapidly unclothed her, and bared her white arms to the cool airs of the river, and then—oh, poor trembling maid!—cut away her flowing locks, and turned her from the prettiest of young girls into a shy, uneasy boy.

Luned was still touching her arms and her neck, to find how much of her hair was left, and pulling the tunic closer, still troubling indeed over the strangeness of all her sensations, when she saw Malen's face twitch with a grimace.

"Hark!" she cried, stooping her head, the better to listen; then, "Quick!" She seized Gringolet's bridle as she spoke, untethered him, and led him to the edge of the trees, pointing to the nearest thicket of the neighbouring woodside, about a furlong further away. "To Llanfair!" she said. "If ye don't find my blesséd master, Rhosser, there—and I fear it he'll be gone—the Lady of Llanfair will give ye saddle and pouch, and tell whither to ride. And if anybody try to hinder, since ye can whistle—for I heard how ye piped and whistled up the merlen *—whistle the capping stave of 'Mentra Gwen.'

* Pony.

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That is the signal betwixt my lord, Rhosser, and his men. And now, my bird, ye must ride fast, ye must fly! Not a word more. Hark! Away with ye!"

Luned heard the tramp of feet—men running, she thought—and then a low baying, like the bell of bloodhounds; and with one cry of "Oh, Gringolet!" she mounted him and galloped away, afraid even to look back.

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CHAPTER II

HOWEL FARF

TO reach Rhôs when he did, so early in the morning, Howel Farf had to start from his strong-house at Castle Howel soon after nightfall.

He had lately made what he called a very pretty offer to Luned's father and his brother-in-law, Roger or Rhosser—to match his ward Jestyn with her. Luned, having come home for good at the end of the year from St. Brieux, was supposed already to be marriageable; and if Rhosser agreed, Howel swore he would make Jestyn (as he was without wife or children himself) his sole heir. There was a mystery about Jestyn. His father was said to be Morgan of Miskin, who was a gentleman of learning given to ungentlemanly pursuits, including the black art. But Morgan of Miskin (who was dubbed Morgan Olaf, or the Last, by Howel, because after a dispute over some land with Howel he had disappeared leaving a childless wife) was probably dead. Howel, on this assumption, had contrived to take possession of his affairs, in spite of Morgan's wife.

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She, poor lady, had preferred Morgan to Howel in other days, and only escaped Howel now by dying some months later in giving birth to a babe—Jestyn. Howel took charge of the babe, and fathered it as if it was his own. Possibly it was because of these doings that Rhosser did not approve of Howel's latest plan for Jestyn.

"Rhosser's too tough to be taken in, and Rhosser's daughter too tender to be wed!" that was the curt message he sent.

"Very well," said Howel on hearing the message. "He has another husband in his head; but his head has got a worm in it, too."

"Ay," said Cadno (Howel's captain of Redhands, a man of bulk). "What did Walter say when he supped with Rhosser at the wine house at Laugharne? He said Rhosser kept crooking his third finger all thro' the meat and wine; and that, says he, is your true sign of the man who is going mad, with a worm in his head, like a curly worm in a cobnut. When the worm curls, the finger must crook!"

"*Pwt!*" said Howel, "rot!" (a favourite expletive of his). "It's nonsense about the worm, but he's right about the man. They say Rhosser cannot sleep, and walks the hall of Rhôs all night, and dreams he's in the tidal ditches of Taf. Now he is gone to the White Abbey to make peace with the Church, for he owes money to the Abbot for his last

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raid, and he knows he won't last a year. All the more reason why Jestyn should wed his dainty daughter; and he shall, he *shall!*"

"How?" said Cadno.

"How? fool! Why, carry her off and marry her out of hand. Jestyn is a nice boy, that any maid might take to. When she sees him she is his. I'll give him a chance,—I'll give him three!"

"What if she won't?"

"*Pwt!* she must, else I'll—I'll—— But she shall!" And as he said it he laughed to himself, passing his hand over his black-bearded mouth, so as to draw out the moustaches.

When, a day or two later, the news came of Rhosser's journey to Castle Arberth, Howel was pleased.

"Good!" said he, speaking very softly, as he always did when he meant mischief. "Then, we'll to Rhôs!"

* * * * *

The house at Rhôs was barely awake when Howel Farf and his men reached there that morning and came thundering without. In the absence of Rhosser, Luned's mother reigned within. A woman of spirit, my lady Lowry of Rhôs was frail to look upon, and walked with a slight limp. Her thin features had to be seen at their best ere one noticed her invincible grey eyes. Even Howel Farf owned

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himself afraid of his half-sister's eyes. They were flashing in a way to frighten him now, had he seen them, as she went limping, pale and angry, across the floor of the hall, which was strewn with overturned stools and pails. In the midst of them Lowry paused, a sword as long as herself in one hand, confronting Malen, who had slept in her hut in the Rhôs trees last night, and had appeared now to bring the alarm. How she had got into the house nobody knew, nobody troubled to inquire. She would do anything for Rhosser: that was enough.

The long table, forty feet by seven, was already thrust, end-on, against the double doors. A half-clad girl, in a red petticoat, was hastily blowing up a fire on the hearth with a bellows; another girl was hitching a cauldron of water a notch lower to catch the curling flames.

"Where was the little maid?" that was the one question, and one that at every moment was being given fresh force from without.

"Hark!" said her mother. "What are they calling?"

All listened. The calls became plainer and louder.

"Rob—Robart Goch, or the little Mistress! Rob, or the Maid of Rhôs!"

"But where is my sweet, silly maid?" said her mother, looking in consternation at them all, angry tears in her eyes.

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"There," said Malen, pointing over her shoulder, "there—by the waterside. I saw her riding her dandy horse down the reedy meadow to the river."

"Then we must stop her coming back!"

Even as she said it the clamour at the door redoubled.

"We have no lad!" continued her mother. "Luned must be our messenger. And since she is out, she must remain out, and ride away ere they spy her! She cannot come back; but, three notes on her hunting-pipe and a boy's coat on her back! and she may save Rhôs and find her father. We must send her the grey tunic and coat, and boy's hose, to the meadow. Ah, but you must cut her hair short about her head—poor maid! But how?"

She looked dubiously at Malen, and then, seized with an idea, continued: "See, Malen, if we can get you out quietly at the back, with a bundle of clothes, you can steal down the meadow, and get the little mistress safe away. That is it. But Howel—Malen—can you—how will you slip through him and his dogs?"

"Leave it to me!" said Malen: "leave him to me, lady honey! I know Howel Farf, and he knows me. Not one of his dirty dogs will so much as bark at Malen."

"Don't forget to tell her to pipe soft the three notes I told you of—from 'Mentra Gwen.' 'Tis the

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signal betwixt my lord and his men. There's luck in the whistle."

The next thing was to get Malen out. The lowest shot-window was on the turret stair, and that was too narrow and too high up. However, she succeeded in slipping out by the same gate that Luned had used. She had safely reached the end of the nettle-path ere Howel's men saw what was happening. Then one of them saw her, and they made a rush, and seeing only the old woman, they fell back with a derisive chorus:

"Hag, Hag!
Where's your nag?"

But then Howel approached, and his men fell back.

Malen eyed Howel with a fixed eye, a mate for his own. He returned the gaze for a moment; then his eyes fell, and he turned away muttering, "What mischief has the old witch in her head?" In the end Malen walked past him without hindrance, and on to a wattle hut in the trees, used by Rhosser's woodmen for their gambo, or wood-sledge. On entering it, the old woman flung to the crazy door, as if in fury.

It was a mere hovel, backed against a bank of clay and red earth. Howel, growing suspicious, sent Cadno to watch the door; but he paid small heed to his charge until a rustle near by startled him. Then he turned and thought he saw a hare, a

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black hare, disappearing through the trees. On going to the hut he found its door ajar and the place empty.

Fearing Howel's anger, Cadno went back to find him directing a party at the rear of the house, and told the tale of Malen's disappearance.

"A black hare!" he cried, drawing his short sword and rapping Cadno sharply with the flat of the blade over the knuckles—"a hare! Then you can turn harrier, Cadno, fat as you are! Off! go and hunt her. Take the two hounds: they are in the way here. I'll give ye an hour. Else——" He dropped his head with a suave smile, and shot his sword into its sheath with a snap. Then he whistled up the two enormous black hounds which were of the party. "Take 'em to the hut!" he said; "they will soon have the old hag, wherever she's gone."

Cadno went as he was bid, but he went grumbling: "If Howel hunt the black hare, the worse for Howel, and the worse for us all. *Mari anw'l*,—in the end the hare will hunt us, and haunt us, man and hound!"

In less than a quarter of an hour they heard the hounds baying down by the river. The hunting of the black hare had begun.

"Blood of man!" cried Howel. "To see my black pets harry a black witch will do my heart good. Now, my chaffers, five of you keep guard

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here till we bring back the hare. Then we'll roast her, we'll roast her in front of the house, and they shall sup on her. Come, Jestyn dear!"

Jestyn shook his head. A pale, dark, handsomely featured face, with large brown eyes, very different from Howel's, and straight black moustaches, showed itself under his feathered velvet cap. Superbly attired in a totally black riding-suit, shoes, tunic, velvet cap, he had a bearing which marked him out from the rest of the party.

"I'll stay, sire, with your permission," he said carelessly. "As 'twas the Maid of Rhôs brought us here, here let me stay till I see her." He spoke in a tone independent yet deferential, as if he feared Howel, while struggling to hold his own.

His refusal to go as it was half offended Howel, who went off, with his ejaculation of "*Pwt!*" to loosen his horse from its tether in the oak-scrub and ride after Cadno. The baying of hounds continued, now louder, now fainter, muffled by intervening trees. When Howel was gone, Jestyn sent the remaining men off round the house as a patrol party, and himself leant against a tree, his eyes on the lowest window.

"I would dearly like a glimpse of the maid," he murmured, and hummed under his breath a snatch of the old song of Keri's daughter:

"Alone I go a-hunting, when all their hunting's done;
To follow Keri's daughter, in the footsteps of the sun."

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CHAPTER III

THE LADY OF LLANFAIR

THE same sullen baying of Howel's hounds that reached Jestyn below the walls of the house pursued Luned as she rode into the wood. She heard the Rhôs hounds, Bran and Abran, reply within to the baying without. If it frightened her, it terrified Gringolet. His gallop grew wild and she soon lost all control of him. His bright eyes, his sharp thorn-like little ears, showed his terror as she bent forward on his neck.

To her every thought of Rhôs, of Howel Farf beating at the doors, of his men ranging restlessly under the walls,—the baying of the hounds served as an evil echo. Haunted by these fears, she saw Gringolet carry her past the cross-forest track, that she ought to have taken to the north, without being able to turn his head. He went on at a headlong gallop, his hoofs scattering over her the water of the little pools left by last night's rain, while the trees flew by like so many green splashes.

When there came another parting in the ways, at

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a master-oak, Gringolet took that which led to the left; and as he turned she caught a glimpse of the two black hounds pursuing a smaller animal, and always drawing nearer. She shuddered as she thought of the hounds tearing the hare into a thousand pieces, and then, whetted by her blood, pursuing Gringolet with redoubled fury. At this moment Gringolet, in his terror, stumbled, and righting himself with a lurch, made her lose her seat and slip sideways off his back. She would have fallen but for her hold on the reins.

"We are lost!" she cried. "Gringolet, we are lost."

Her eyes met his pitifully, and then turned as if for help to a leaning birch-tree beside them. One glance more, and the hounds might be upon them.

But no: instead of taking the same path as Gringolet had chosen at the master-oak, they took the other. Unable to mount again in her terror, she saw them clearly through the underwood, their black heads close to the ground. But in a breath, they had left her and Gringolet in their rear. She stood staring at the spot where they had disappeared in a white terror, until Gringolet's nose laid upon her shoulder by way of reassurance made her turn to him.

Remounting then, she started lowly, as the track that turned north toward Llanfair compelled Gringolet to pick his way with care. It was overgrown

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with great briars, and after a while grew so rough that it was hardly more than the rocky bed of the rivulet which ran down it. But she pressed on, and soon was on the verge of an open space of grass, beyond which the track again was continued to the bottom of a gentle ascent set with oaks, illumined by a pale primrose shrine. Here a noise of light steps in the thicket alarmed her, and she thought it might be well to whistle the signal of the Rhôs men; for Howel Farf's men could not come from that direction. She eased Gringolet's bridle, and put the whistle to her lips. Attempting the triple notes of "Mentra Gwen," she chanced in her agitation on another air altogether, a strain penetrating and rare—like the essence of a thousand bird-notes. Its effect was such that the whistle might indeed have been, as she was told when it was given her at St. Brieux, a witch-pipe. For a shy doe stole out of the underbrush, and paused in the glade, gazing inquiringly at them, and then began to approach them quite fearlessly. A moment only; then there came the sound, softened by miles of trees, of deep baying hounds. Distant as the baying was, the beautiful creature pricked its ears and bounded swiftly away through the beeches. But the hounds were clearly passing out of range. Luned felt her heart bold in her, and she blew the refrain of "Mentra Gwen."

"Hasten, Gringolet!" She dropped her whistle,

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assumed a boyish air, and soon they had galloped out upon the open moor beyond the last trees. Then her spirits rose at a bound. A dark elbow of brown mountain on the right contained in its inner crook the Llanfair demesne. She heard a cuckoo calling from its trees, and riding on, caught sight of a curl of dun smoke in the glyn. Her only qualm came at the thought of being recognised there in her boy's garb. She looked rather anxiously up the long elm avenue when she reached the gates. But she met nobody in the cool and dark courtyard at the top, to open whose wicket she had to dismount. A foolish young hound, that insisted on walking sideways first under Gringolet's feet and then her own, finally appeared—the sole living creature she had seen so far.

Finding a stable door open, she led Gringolet in, and fastened him in an empty stall. In the next stall stood a handsome black horse, richly caparisoned, with a brown sendal saddle-cloth embroidered with gold. She felt her apprehensions return ten-fold at the sight, dreading as she did to encounter strange faces, curious glances. Her hope had been to find the Lady of Llanfair alone; but there must be visitors at the house. The horse evidently belonged to some great personage. She was almost as afraid of being scrutinised by strangers in her boy's garb as of being faced by Howel's hounds; but she nerved herself to be bold.

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A side-door, recessed in a deep arch, let her into the house by a long passage. The whole place appeared to her asleep. She passed two doorways into the kitchens, which were empty. Then she remembered it was Calanmai Fair Day, when it was the custom for the maids and men-folk to go down to the village feast every year.

The passage brought her into the great hall of the house—an apartment of some state, with a dais and long table at its head, lit by two small arched windows high in the wall. One end of the table was spread with a white diaper, and upon it a silver salver with herbs and salt, a dish of viands, a silver flagon, and a dainty pile of flat small loaves of white bread; an inviting repast, evidently prepared for two people, though nobody was to be seen. A noise of crackling came from under the table. It was a yellow cat, eating some stolen bone, —and the viands on the board, and the noise beneath it, reminded Luned that her slight breakfast of oatcake and honey, hours ago, had left her ravenous. She called to the cat, but it ran away and up the stairway behind the dais. Quite innocently she followed it, and at the top of the stairs found a narrow passage which led into a small apartment. And here Luned was brought to a sudden stop—for she heard voices, and the sound of one was a man's appeal, and the other a woman's sob.

Luned turned and fled, without either noticing

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the intrusion. She sped past the top of the stairway in her fright, and attempting to enter the next dark doorway, knocked her forehead against the door, making a slight noise, bruising herself painfully and losing her cap. Hastily then, without waiting to recover it, she reached the stairs, and descended, stumbling in her haste; being indeed momentarily stunned from the blow.

When she reached the hall she sank into a seat at the end of the table. After a while she heard footsteps on the stair. Whereupon she steadied herself, and rose from her seat.

The step was light; it might have been the foot of a girl. A slight form, graceful and radiant, in a sky-blue gown, stepped out from the stairs. The Lady Efa of Llanfair started at seeing the form of a youth and apparent stranger. She turned her face away from the light, bending her head as she spoke; and her voice shook with a slight tremor.

"Well, young sir," she began; and then, looking a second time at Luned, exclaimed, "Why, sweet silly, what is this? Why, Luned, you haven't run away? You are pale,—are you hurt? What can have brought you here in these runaway strange grey feathers?"

Luned, rising, did her best to affect a blunt, boyish air. But when the Lady of Llanfair advanced and took her hands, saying, "But, child, child, how

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tired you look," she lost her self-command, tried to laugh, and so trying, burst into tears. Efa drew Luned to her breast, and passing her hand round her neck to comfort her, said, "And all your pretty hair, too!"—herself beginning to laugh and sob together for sympathy.

"But how did you come," she asked, "and why did you come, and where in the name of Rhosser's daughter are you going?"

Luned's sobs stopped; she tried again to smile.

"I rode Gringolet; he is in the stable. My uncle Howel and his Redhands—they are at Rhôs; and I must ride, and never draw rein hereafter, till I find my father. Sweet lady of Llanfair, whither is he gone?" She clasped her hands in her terror.

"Dear heart!" cried the other, "Howel at Rhôs,—Howel, and your mother all alone with the maids, and you turned post-boy? No wonder you are pale. My poor Luned, taste some of this bragget; 'twill revive you, 'twill indeed. But what noise was there?"

"Alack!" cried Luned, "can it be Gringolet?"

The Lady of Llanfair shook her head. She started, looked uneasily towards the stair, and then hastily went to its foot. After a pause, she ascended, closing the side-door after her. Luned, having always the fear of Howel's men and their pursuit in her mind, listened anxiously. She heard steps on another staircase; then came a pause, and then again she

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heard light, descending steps, with others, heavier, following.

Some little while passed. Luned had left the bragget untasted. Her head had sunk forlornly between her two hands on the table. Before she knew it, she had dozed. She woke to feel Efa running a light hand over her shortened locks.

"Child, child," she said, "you have not eaten nor drunk. Now you must both eat and talk to me. Your face is full of Rhôs and your mother. I have been to your little Arab in the stable. What a creature, head like a red deer's! But you had no saddle, and you must have ridden him like an Arab. Tired?—why, the poor thing all but talked to me about it. He is quite spent."

"Oh, poor Gringolet! But I cannot stay," began Luned. "Think of Howel Farf and all his Red-hands ranging about Rhôs. That is why. Oh, have I been sleeping?"

"A little. But those wasps? How did you get out of the house without a sting?"

"I was out already, out at daybreak,—that is why I am so sleepy,—riding Gringolet round the meadows. And now, as father is gone on, I must ride after him."

"It is not safe. The countryside is like a place of thieves and crows. I will send a messenger, and you shall stay here with me."

But no! Luned was not to be persuaded. After

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she had eaten a few mouthfuls of white bread and honey, and sipped the bragget, she begged Efa to go with her to the stable, and see to finding Gringolet a saddle; and Efa gave way before her urgency.

The stable was a dark one. They led Gringolet out into the yard for better light, Luned holding his head. Efa herself brought water. One of his white-stockinged hind legs showed a red fleck of blood. It was nothing much; but when Luned proceeded to bathe it for him, while the Lady of Llanfair held his head, his grateful nods and sighs and grunts of satisfaction, and bids for caresses, were as plain as speech.

"Where did Rhosser get such a marvellous dainty beast?" said Efa.

"At a fair in Bristo', from a gipsy groom. He is truly an Arab. See his twisted tail! The gipsy called him 'Farpar,' but I christened him 'Gringolet' after the horse in the old story."

While the trio were thus engaged, they heard another horse pause with a snort, and the rider click the latch of some outer gate. Luckily, the gate appeared to be bolted; but the horseman, whoever he was, must have come up very stealthily, keeping to the grass, to arrive thus without their even hearing his hoofs.

The same thought occurred to both of them: could it be one of Howel's men in pursuit? Quick as thought Efa had whipped Gringolet and Luned

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into the stable. She had thrown a horse-rug over the one, and was whispering the other to hide in a neighbouring stall, there being no time to reach the hay-loft, when the newcomer, who must have left his horse at the gate, and found some other way in, was heard fairly running across the yard.

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CHAPTER IV

THE WAY TO ARBERTH

LUNED had not fully secured a hiding-place when the hasty horseman was already staring in.

"Ha, ha!" was all he was able to ejaculate at first, for want of breath; but he made up for lack of words by the furious, suspicious glances he cast at the half-covered flanks of Gringolet and at his wife. It was indeed the master of Llanfair. He attempted no greeting to her, but roaming the stables, blurted out,—

"What, what! What hot young squire is this that—" he hesitated here, looking about and peering into the depths of the stable, and then added, "that o'er-rides his cattle?"

With this he made a sudden dive into the stall where Luned lurked, in increasing terror. She did not know but that Howel himself was at hand; Sir Griffis's voice was, in truth, so breathless and excited, that any one might have failed to recognise it. But when he had seized Luned roughly by the arm, she was undeceived.

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What she saw was a burly little gentleman of fifty, with fierce bloodshot blue eyes under bent brows, and the slightest pretext of a chin under an exuberant red moustache. He was handsomely accoutred in buff and blue; dark blue hose, and a handsome buff surcote over his steel vest. He rushed into the stable, hot and determined to be hotter, furiously puffing out his cheeks.

He was dragging her out in triumph, puffing out one furious "Ha, ha!" after another, when his wife cried, "Stay, Sir Griffis! stay, man! Don't you recognise Luned—little Luned of Rhôs? Where did you leave her father? Your friend Howel Farf has laid his Redhands about the house."

"Serves Rhosser right!" cried Sir Griffis, not knowing where to turn in his rage, and pulling off his stiff riding-gloves with a jerk. "He laughed at my French hose and my new gilt spurs, and said my tongue was turned Norman. If I had not known him for a madman, I'd have sp-spitted him! As it was, I left him and his company and turned home."

Rhosser had as likely as not been amusing himself at Sir Griffis's expense; but this was not the reason for the latter's speedy return home. Sir Griffis was jealous of his wife, who had been reckoned a beauty, had had many suitors, and had suffered by his choice of her. He had made this sudden return with a view to trapping a suspected rival. Indeed, an hour, half an hour earlier, and he must have found the

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visitor whose voice Luned had heard. In her grey tunic and young squire's dress she served now as an absurd substitute for the real Sir Launcelot.

"You are well returned," said presently his lady, while he fumed. "You have a chance now any man might envy you."

"And what's that?"

"To save Rhôs."

"What, and make Howel my night-hawk and knife-in-the-back! Perhaps it is what you desire," he sneered, going off to get his horse.

Efa turned to Luned and reassured her. "I'll see you equipped for your ride. You must not mind Sir Griffis."

When he returned, he offered in no very gracious manner to escort Luned a mile or two. But, he added, she must wait for him to refect first and rest awhile. As may be supposed, Luned was both impatient to get on her way and feared such an escort. On her explaining her need of haste, he affected to be offended, and flinging out of the stable left the two alone with Gringolet.

Efa thereupon found saddle and bridle for Gringolet; then, all being ready, she led him out, and walked by Luned's side to the end of the elm avenue, directing her the while as to her route.

On reaching the outer gates of the avenue, they saw how a distant figure on horseback rode high on the western hill, his arms and trappings gleaming

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in the afternoon sun as he passed, was visible for a moment, and then was gone. Luned noticed that her companion's face was full of pain as she gazed, straining her glance after the disappearing figure.

As Luned looked a second time into her soft grey eyes she thought she saw two tears imminent; but they did not fall.

"Sweet child," said she, "dear Luned, I have no one to tell my troubles to. Yon horseman is Sir Philip, a true Knight of France, for the King there hath so dubbed him, though he is in truth a gentleman of Kemes. He returned to these parts but last week from Normandy. Ten years ago, when I was but a maid of sixteen, I pledged myself to him. But my father said nay, for then it was to have wedded but a poor squire. Young Philip went to the Frankish fields. They married me to my lord a year or two later, for *he* did not return. He has power and estate now. He came back thinking I was free (as if I could be). He must have shut his ears. At any rate, I am not free. I am changed, and even if I were free I could not. And he—he is changed, and my love for him is gone; I can love no more. And if I love it is only this troubled land, and oh! I could never leave it. See,"—she drew a little turquoise ring from her bosom—"there is his pledge. More I may not tell you. But I promised to send him a message ere he should leave the country. This ring I prithee carry to him, and

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say I trust to his courtesy, and I shall pray for him always, and that he must bear you company as far as Arberth Castle, where he will tarry. But I—say that I—hereafter may set eyes on him no more. And in truth, sweet maid, he were best forget me, and all that I was to him."

Luned grew so sorrowful at the burden of this confession that the Lady of Llanfair changed her note.

"But," she cried, "you must look not so mournful! Think now of all that hangs on you and your brave hackney. Play the boy, blow on your silver whistle the signal if you are in trouble, and forget if you can that ever you wore womanish weeds. Up with your chin. See, here is a little silver-tricked dagger for your belt, to match your pretty flute. May you never need it! Say not a word to any; and as for yonder gentleman, bear him the ring with a careless, courteous air; and you were wiser to say nothing to him of your father; but tell him, if he asks, that your name is—what shall we say?—Ivor or Iwain?—and your errand pressing. Farewell then, Luned; farewell, Luned no longer, but Ivor!"

When Luned reached the top of the hill, she saw the horseman riding carelessly, head down, rein loose, along a descending grass-grown track far below her. Knowing how much depended upon her making haste, she shook off her maidenish terrors of him with a shake of the reins, and cantered Gringolet lightly after him down the green slope.

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He took no notice of her even when she was only a dozen paces away; then, much embarrassed by his preoccupied mien, she coughed. He raised his eyes, scanning her diffidently with the unmoved expression of a man who does not wish to be taken out of his own thoughts.

She tried to deliver message and ring to him precisely as Efa had directed her. But whether from shyness, or the thought of her own and Efa's troubles, a blush came to her cheek and a break to her voice; and the knight, growing interested, bent a pair of steady eyes upon her. Then with a smile, he surprised her by suddenly doffing his steel cap, lifting it lightly by the red-leather flap shaped like a bird's wing fastened on one side of it.

"So," says he, looking puzzled, and speaking in very clear French, "I prithee, sweet young sire, if I am to be thy convoy so far as Arberth, what am I to call you? Iwain? Iwain or Gawain: they have been heard before. Well, Master Iwain, two of my escort wait below; but you—you will ride at my side, I trust."

"Ivor, I pray you, my lord!" she stammered; "so the lady Efa said."

His eyes fell at the name. He turned the ring in the palm of his great glove, and then, ungloving his other hand, put it away.

"Come!" he said, "young sire! We have a long

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ride before us! If we meet hind, knight or pedlar, 'twill be prudent that you ride a few paces behind, betwixt my body-squire and me. And if you are questioned, say you go with your lord to a tourney at Arberth!"

With that he stuck spurs into his horse, and led the way over the rough and furzy slope, stretching to the waterside thickets of the Cothi river. There a borrel-clad squire, mounted on a piebald hackney, waited his master.

They journeyed on then with little incident, and the knight after a while relaxed his pace, and fell again into abstraction. Luned's impatience grew in proportion as he appeared less concerned about their rate of advance.

A score of times she was about to begin, "I pray you, my lord, I had needs make great haste; permit that I ride on before!" But always her courage failed. Once, as the day began to fade, and the sun sank over the moors and meadows and high farm-lands that lie below Precelly, she did attempt it; but he fairly took the words out of her mouth.

"We draw nigh at last," he said. "It is long since we passed Llanboidy. I know not, young sire, whom you seek at Arberth?"

"The Master of Rhôs," she replied, forgetting Efa's warning about her being too communicative.

"Rhôs?" he repeated: "what Rhôs? People

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have called my cousin, the Lord of Kemes, master of Rhôs." He said this with the air of a long accustomed superiority, a pride of rank and place and great possessions, which did not escape her.

"I mean Rhôs-nant in Elfed," she said timidly. "I seek Rhosser of Rhôs."

"Rhosser of Rhôs," said the knight. "It is a vile herald's pun. There is no cousinry between the names of Rhosser or Roger or Proger, or whatever his name may be, and Rhôs. But, let me tell you, as I am your escort, and your guardian for the time being, you do not well to trust your safety to that same Rhosser, who has stolen cattle out of Pembroke ere now, as no doubt he has stolen a coat-of-arms to suit his fine title. Rhosser of Rhôs *pardieu!*"

Luned's face flushed a challenge. "Nay!" she cried. "He has the blood of the Towy princes in his veins. He is a noble lord and gentleman. You do not well, sire, to speak to me so of one who is——" She hesitated then, but went on glaring at him so fiercely that the knight could not forbear a smile.

"I see," he said, "though your French speech is so sweet, you do not favour the Norman side in our disputes. But for this same Roger, Rhosser of Rhôs, do you know, young sieur, that I bear to my cousin a king's warrant over Roger and his demesne in

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Elfed? He still hopes, foolish Welshman, to see a Welsh head crowned. He may yet see several cut off."

Luned, from crimson, turned white.

"Sire,—my lord," she protested, "you are wrong to seek his hurt and you are very wrong—to speak thus of him to one who is his——"

"His young cousin perchance?"

"One who has left his house to seek him, in great sorrow and trouble." Her pretty round face so gazed upon him with such an eloquent reproach of cruel fate and himself in its every feature, that he coughed, and flushed beneath his bronze skin. But if he had suspicions, he hid them quickly.

"Sweet young sir," he stammered, "I declare on my knightly oath I shall abide by my courtesy to you, and I will as I may further your quest; and know, if I spoke as I did amiss, it was in a degree of ignorance." This was perhaps not quite sincere; but the apology was courteous, and courteously intended; and at any rate it served.

They rode on for miles without another word, cantering side by side. In this way, silent, occupied with their own thoughts, they found themselves passing by a dark wood, a little chapel, a wayside inn with packhorses at the door. It was clear that they were rapidly nearing at last some inhabited region.

At length, a wide vale opened below them, and a

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small struggling town on the flank of a hill, with a castle on an erratic separate mound starting up at its foot. The dusk was closing in as they descended the street and then climbed again to the castle yard. The place was full of gossiping servants and stirring men,—here leading horses into stall, or bearing flagons and dishes out of a side-door; there burnishing swords and greaves and bits.

But the twilight scene about her, full of passing folk and foreign voices, that at other times would have roused her fancy, only told Luned that she was from home. She felt herself trembling as the knight, having handed over his own horse, came to her side.

"Come!" he said in a voice full of consideration. "I have asked for a retired chamber for you. The gentleman you ask for is not here, but has gone to the Abbey of the White-Lands. To-morrow you may fare thither after him. To-night you must stay here. Every care shall be taken of you. You shall be shown to your chamber at once. A cup of wine is good when one is right tired. A good draught of it too. It shall be put at your door."

She stammered out her thanks, too tired to grasp the meaning of all he had said. She found herself stumbling sleepily up a winding stair in the wall after a little round-faced page dressed in white and blue, and carrying a taper. It was but a child. He stared at her with wide eyes.

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"How old are you?" he said at her door: "I am twelve. Some call me Perrot—some Prys. My father, Rys, lives at Uchdrud, but my foster-brother will be lord of Arberth and Sir Perrot, so I bear his name. Shall I help you take off your long hose? I wish you weren't sick. There are honey cakes for us, and the pages have the feathers of the roasted peacocks to play for silver groats with." He yawned himself as he spoke, and looked so chubby and rosy, that Luned forgot her rôle for a moment. Stooping, she kissed him—so heartily in the need of affection she felt in her absence from the friendly hearts of Rhôs, that he was quite taken aback.

"I wonder who you are?" he said. "You're going at daybreak, aren't you? But you must leave your pretty red hackney; and I'll play you at chop-cheeks with the foils when you come back. Where got you that pretty silver pipe? Can you whistle on it? I'm not going to bed, not for a long while yet."

It was some few minutes ere he returned with a flagon of wine and some sweet cake to the door of her tiny chamber. By this she had undressed. He was pushing open the door when she cried out: "Oh, don't come in!"

"One would think you were a fairy, that turned into a spider every night," he grumbled as he went off.

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Luned drank some of the spiced wine. It was sweet, soft as milk to the palate, and slightly flavoured with cinnamon. As for the comfit-cakes, she took one to bed, and munching it, fell fast asleep.

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CHAPTER V

THE GREY TUNIC TASTES STEEL

VERY early next morning Luned was aroused by a voice in her chamber. She thought she was still at Rhôs, and wondered whose the voice could be? It was Perrot, who stood at her bedside.

"There," said he, "I got up to see you. I promised your famous lord I would. He must be a baron at least. Look what he gave me!" He held up a gold mark. "You are to start at five: there is a great brown hackney for you. Which way did you ride yesterday? Your chestnut is lame. Did you come by Uchdrud? My father lives at Uchdrud,—and Tom. What, you know Uchdrud? You haven't a very stout fist for a squire, have you? Lucky thing your lord is so big." He threw the gold coin into the air and caught it again, hopped on one foot and said: "He must be a prince! I'm going now: for I know you're afraid to show your spider-legs to me!"

And off the cheerful little imp trotted.

She felt she could have slept for hours longer.

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The morning air came in cold through the eyelet window. But the mention of Uchdrud and the sight of the grey tunic lying across the chest at the foot of her pallet quickly aroused her. The folk at Uchdrud were akin to them at Rhôs—suppose Perrot Prys were her cousin? And so her mind jumped suddenly and painfully to Rhôs, and her mother, who probably had not slept all night. Even now Rhôs might be in Howel's grip. She started up at the thought, catching a glimpse of a grey morning sky above a noble grove of elms, where the rooks were cheerily cawing and squabbling.

When she had descended the stair, and stepped out at its foot into the courtyard, she found there, although it was so early, plenty of folk going and coming. She wanted to see Gringolet, and was seeking courage to ask where he was stabled, when Perrot came up again.

"I'm not half awake yet!" he said. Indeed, his round eyes looked blurred, and the way in which his chubby fists rubbed his pointed nose, suggested nothing so much as a sleepy puppy-hound. But he knew every nook and corner of the castle, and he took her by a sloping alley to the lower courtyard and the stables.

Gringolet was lying down in his stall, his off hind leg stretched out stiffly and much swollen; but he staggered up at her call.

She had put a comfit-cake from last night into her

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pouch, and gave it him. Perrot, who had run off, speedily came back, and sang out that my gentleman of Kemes was awaiting her within the great hall. She kissed Gringolet, her heart sinking.

"Why, you are turned as white as if you were going to be whipped!" said Perrot. "Are you afraid of your great knight? I'm not afraid of anybody."

Luned turned from Gringolet, and looked at Perrot, whereat he mischievously added, with a grimace, that the knight was teased about her last night, "after the harping."

Luned grew uneasy. "Why?" she asked.

"Nissen said you were no young squire, but a dressed-up maid. Are you? I think you are too?"

"Oh, say I am not, if they ask you!" she said earnestly. "Why, can maids pipe a tune? I can. Listen?" Standing beside Gringolet, she whistled there on her silver pipe a few bars of "Merch Megan."

Perrot scanned her curiously with his sleepy eyes the while. "Yes, you can whistle," he admitted, leading the way to the hall. They did not find the gentleman of Kemes there; but there was mead and *pain-de-main* * and butter set forth for Luned. After breaking her fast on these, she was hurried by Perrot

* Fine white bread.

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to the courtyard, where a groom held two horses, a lumpish brown and a noble black. Beside them stood a youth with a long yellow riding-cloak, holding the stirrup for the knight. Luned was forgetting her squire's salutation to her supposed master, when Perrot startled her by saying, "You are surely a maid, to forget your congee. Off with your cap, quick!"

She made a prettily awkward attempt at it. The knight as he stood there—his purple tunic over a steel jacket—wearing only a long sword, and fastening a glove, made her a bow in return. He pointed to the riding-cloak. Evidently it was meant for her. She noticed, as he turned to his horse and spoke to the groom, the stern lines in his bronzed face and the martial tone to which his words were set. She feared for her people and their lesser Rhôs, and a shiver shook her to the heart as she thought of the power of great Norman houses like this, and great Normans like this knight and his cousin of Kemes, arrayed against the ancient holds and lands of her father.

"Don't be afraid of him," said Perrot, as he helped Luned to mount her big brown horse. In truth, the huge back and cumbrous seat of the beast, and his awkward height, as she compared them to Gringolet's, had rather alarmed her for the journey. "Nor him!" and he nodded from behind the horse towards the knight. "I wouldn't be afraid of any Norman. But

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he has Welsh blood in him too. That's why he looks so fierce. He is not going far with you,—I'll tell you. Last night, one they call Griffis of Llanfair came hither when you were gone to your bed, and another with him. And he accosted your master and called him scornfully King of Kemes and Prince of Penfro; high and hot words there were in hall. The end of it is—a meeting on the jousting green this morning. Ha, you will miss that—and perhaps one shall be killed too. But farewell: you must away! I'll see your pretty hackney is cared for, and ride him every day round the yard!"

Luned's head spun with these mingled informations as she rode out from the portcullis by the knight's side. He said nothing till they had passed a farm-holding, a few furlongs from the castle, where a cock was crowing lustily. Thereupon he reined up his horse to a walk on the brink of a steep dingle.

"That cock-crow reminds me," he said as they descended, "I may not go much further with you. The road hence to White-Lands is plain, and much ridden by the brown and white friars. There you will find your father, and he will rout those rascals at Rhôs-in-Elfed ere the night is over, I trust. It needs that you tell him nothing of me; but give him this, young sieur, if so I must call you?" He handed her—with a courteous gesture, and a smile at the humour of the predicament—a roll of parch-

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ment with a red seal. "It is the warrant you wot of," he said. "Put it away in your deepest and safest pouch, and tell your father you won it from me in fair fight."

The words were not fairly over his lips ere a furious clattering on the road behind made them both turn and look round. At first they could see nothing, because of the sharpness of the bank over which they had just come. But ere they reached the stream that spread itself over a gravelly ford below, Luned, turning again, saw to her dismay the mailed caps and jackets of two horsemen, shining like metal figures in the grey light, appear over the top of the bank. Now, the older of the two was marked by a drooping red moustache, and her heart sank as she noticed this, and recognised its wearer for the Master of Llanfair. Whether by good hap or not, her cloak and the lapelled hood disguised her past risk of discovery.

With his fellow horseman closely attending him, he charged upon them at full gallop. The knight waved Luned aside, and she had backed her horse up the stream a few paces ere the other reached the ford.

"Sir Philip, Sir Philip!" cried Griffis of Llanfair as he came on. "You think to escape me. Holy Asa—you sha'nnot! Where's your word of honour? Draw, in King Ned's name, ere my sword eats you! Shame, man! flying away—ay, creeping away with

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your squire at daybreak. How shall you account for that?"

The black flush of passion on his face, the puffing out of his mobile red moustaches, the reckless fury of his gestures as he drew his sword, the violence of his words, were amazing to behold. As for his companion,—curled locks, silken moustaches and effeminate features, small-lipped, and fair-complexioned to a degree, looked out of all keeping with the stiff steel greaves and warlike devices he wore.

"I was looking forward to our passage-at-arms," said the gentleman of Kemes, drawing, and backing away with difficulty from Sir Griffis. "You shall have your will, as you will; and I have not forgot my time. It wants an hour yet of it. Till then, we speed nothing by brawling. I return when I have seen this young squire to the White-Lands."

"You are very careful of your squire," broke in the exquisite young man. "I doubt if he has heard your sword sing, for all your courage. Fight you both and shame you both, I would,—let me die if I wouldn't." His voice sounded so slim and lisping, that Luned could not forbear an hysterical little laugh.

"He shall fight you another day," said the knight, smiling too through his annoyance at the absurdity of the whole affair, "when you have sharpened your lath on me!"

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At this, Luned's heart seemed to stop. Her face grew pale, and not without reason. The exquisite young man, angered by this speech, suddenly drew his sword, and so frightened his horse by spurring through the loose stones and boulders toward Luned, that it plunged furiously, backed, and ended by thrusting itself rudely against the gentleman of Kemes; who then, with a turn of the rein, brought his own horse sharply about, separating the two. But in doing this, he also encountered Griffis of Llanfair. Their swords met. Luned prayed a little prayer for courage, and grasped her dagger.

"You are a coward!" cried, nay screamed, the young man, still flourishing his sword and turning now too on the knight.

He, anxious to avoid a general scrimmage, now parried a stroke, now fairly rode round Master Griffis, keeping by these tactics the young man (who endangered his fellow-fighter's safety the most) well engaged. They were all in the stream—the horses furiously trampling and splashing in the shallow water, when Luned, obeying a glance of her escort, vainly tried to back her horse. She wished her eyes would not swim so, for a film of water in them prevented her seeing clearly; but she saw, or thought she saw, the young man's sword touch the gentleman of Kemes' left shoulder, and a red stain show there.

Thereupon she tried to pull her hard-mouthed

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horse about and go to his succour; when lo! the young man's sword suddenly flew out of his hand, as if by its own volition. And then, distinctly the knight nodded to her, motioning her to ride off up the road, while, wounded or not, fiercely as ever he sustained, hack and thrust, his duel with the Master of Llanfair. But she—she would rather die than retreat. She was amazed, alarmed, exhilarated, by the whirling, rattling, singing swords.

As for the young man's disarming, she could not believe it done by ordinary sword-play. She gazed upon him in wide-open wonder. That look finally demoralised him. With a shrill halloo he charged at her, drawing his dagger, and unluckily her horse, grown quite unmanageable, had chosen this moment to wheel about, leaving her at his mercy. He struck at random, then, stabbing her in the back. The dagger struck, by good hap, on the buckle—hardly pricking her deeply enough to make the blood flow; but she cried out piteously, "Oh, help me!"

An almost simultaneous cry came from Master Griffis, who had collapsed like an empty sack on his horse's neck. The knight was at her side in a moment, and he seized the young man's arm at the wrist, and caught the dagger, pulling it out of his hand.

"Attend your master, squire!" said the knight, rudely enough; "God knows, he needs heartier hands than yours!"

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Luned, seeing the blood stream through my master of Llanfair's mail jacket, and overcome by the look of his ghastly and most fatal face, grew red and pale in turn, and could not help a few piteous sobs.

"God help me!" said the knight, gazing ruefully upon her, "I never dreamt of such a mad fool's dagger-stroke. Is it deep?"

"No-o," sobbed poor Luned. "My buckle saved me. 'Tis but a waspish prick!"

"Mari be praised!" he said. "Come, we may not tarry: there is a hostelry a mile or so beyond. There I will carry you, and then return to these fatal fools."

They rode fast out of the dingle, and along a wooded road, till they came to cross-roads.

There a battered wine-bush, a dirty black crape twisted in its twigs (as left a twelvemonth ago at mine host's funeral), proclaimed the hostelry. A slatternly ale-wife, with a red ribbon tied coquettishly round her fat throat, came to the door. She opened a garrulous fire of welcome on them, pushing aside two sleepy-looking horses to make way for theirs.

"Bless the young Squire-at-arms! bless his noble master! bless the King and the Lord Spences!" (She meant the De Spencers.) "Yes! she knew a good cure for the blood, if it was no spade-deep thrust. A nice foul cobweb, and then a clout on

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top o' that!" All this in voluble Welsh, which she continued to pour forth, though the gentleman of Kemes could not understand a word of it. He walked his horse up and down impatiently without the door, while Luned submitted to the unsavoury attentions of the ale-wife. All the good woman found necessary was to procure a kerchief and tie it beneath the tunic, about the wound; which was in truth nothing. The bleeding had already stopped, and the smart of it was nothing much.

All that was to be seen in the tunic was a red stain, not so big as a penny-piece, a prick in its centre.

On emerging, Luned found the knight in conference with one of the owners of the two horses. He was apparently some inferior cleric, to judge by his rusty buff gown, and he was explaining with profuse humility that he and his companion were on their way to Llangolman. The other stood aloof. To the charge of the first, the knight committed Luned under her assumed name of Ivor,—for as much of the road as they and the supposed young squire might hold together.

"I fear you are wounded too, sire!" she said to him. "It is more than mine."

"Nay, a touch, a touch; nothing more," he replied, with a gesture full of concern at their common plight. Thereupon, waving her such an adieu as might accord with her assumed character and sex and his own

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rank in the eyes of the strange clerics, he dropped a couple of gold crowns in the palm of him that wore the buff gown, set spur to his horse, and galloped off again toward the scene of the late passage of arms in the hollow.

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CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WITH THE VOICE

HARDLY had the knight ridden away when the two clerics were ready to start. Luned noticed that the humbler of the two—he in the buff serge—paid much deference to his companion, whose small, frail figure was clad in a fine black robe, whose slender hands emerged from sleeves lined with purple. But there was that in the face of this little cleric which disturbed her. His silence was oppressive. He never spoke, but now and again he bent his eyes beneath his brow upon her. Eyes and brow, she noticed both. It was a curiously lustrous brow—a brow of steel, and, under it, eyes of steel.

The ale-wife, it is to be observed, did not approve of him. Luned caught a shocking grimace on the woman's mouth as their small cavalcade started. But that was rather in his favour. It was "the grimace of the ape at the gentle," as the old adage has it.

Once started, the two clerics ambled along—their steeds being but meagre beasts—at a poor pace, a

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dozen paces or more in front of her. For some distance they rode in silence, until the cleric in buff turned in his saddle, with a droll kind of awkward gesture and much rolling of his head, showing that he was anxious to address her.

"I was about to ask his reverence, my honoured young sir, a question. Where was young master pleased to be bound? Perhaps to Llangolman? Perhaps to——" He paused, his head on one side.

"To White-Lands," Luned replied, in as conclusive a tone as she could adopt.

When she said it, the little cleric, now well in advance, turned slightly in his saddle, as though he would have looked back; but he did not carry out his intention. His companion rejoined him. Again a mile or two passed in silence.

Then the little cleric spoke for the first time. It was only to utter some casual question, but the voice was amazing. One had thought the voice had a life of its own, apart from the man. Once given a cue, it easily went on, delivering itself in French, Latin, Welsh, or in what sounded like a jargon of all three.

By the fond emphasis of some words she judged the speaker to be a Welshman; but Welsh or French, his voice grew more rapid as it continued, and more resounding.

"You have the letters safe, Jacques? But I foresee the letters alone will not accomplish much. I fear

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the hour is not come for the men of the north to rise, for the south to go free. The King is shaken; the King is falling; the King is unworthy. The Norman over-lords in this anointed region, where St. David aspired, are waxing fat and losing their old boundaries. The Queen is to return soon from France in a cloud of foreign swords, and with her that secular beast, Mortimer, who will die, I prophesy it, Jacques, an adulterer's death, torn and gibbeted. But it is from Hainault, not Normandy, comes the cloud she brings. Before she strike, or while she strike, let the Welsh south be free. We wait a leader, a prince of passion, like him whose head stares upon London. But where is there a prince?"

He paused here, with a superb gesture, addressed to the hawthorns on either side, as if he spoke in the Church Metropolitan to an audience of nobles and princes.

Jacques shrugged his shoulders uneasily, and waved one hand at the little cleric, crying,—

"Oh, seigneur, a prince? Yes, but a prince of the Church, a greater than Gerald—*le voilà*, monseigneur!"

The little cleric gave small heed, and yet Luned noticed that after this he introduced his companion's name more frequently, and softened his voice to a more confidential tone. But the magic of its tones was rather increased, and what words she lost were supplied by her imagination.

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"A Gerald, some one said. I said, a prince, and swords we must have. The Geraldines spent their swords in Ireland, fighting those that should have helped them here. . . . Where is a sword to start, while across the border King and Queen are at odds —to start and to strike? While England is shaken, while kings pass; there is thy chance, O land of lands, that Joseph of Arimathea saw, green land of God. But men, lords in the region there are, that might lead. I have seen one, Jacques, at a tourney at Caerdyf. A golden man, a prince that might have been, a prince lost to us, who. . . . I asked his name. Rhosser ab Jeuan! There was the sword for us. What do we do, Jacques, what do we do? We go to law. Our spiritual heads, Abbot Peter, Bishop David, go to law with him. They have invited him to their feast to-night. Why? That they may take him afterward, trap him with a king's parchment, and waste him in the vaults of some Caer. And so the promised land is estranged; the Church, oh, holy folly—the Church is cheated; its realm will be lost to it, and its day of days gone by, gone by and lost, Jacques, lost. For I foresee troubles, troubles on troubles. And I will tell those, those that know the courts of kings, and the secrets of Edward, and the face of Isabel, and the shadow on the realm, WHY. . . ."

All of this Luned might not quite apprehend, but one thing she gathered: Rhosser was in peril,

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while she was lazily ambling along here. In peril! Was it not clearly proclaimed to her by this ominous resounding voice?

What was she to do? Should she appeal to the little cleric? No, his eyes of steel forbade it. She would have to explain so much. A smart in her back where the dagger had pricked brought her a still more urgent reminder of the risk of delay. She thought of Sir Griffis bowed on the neck of his horse; the deadly faint whitening his features about the drooping red moustaches; the blood on his tunic and on his gauntlet that opened and shut, grasping the air. Ah, let her hasten! If she had only Gringolet, instead of this clumsy horse with the huge fetlocks.

She felt it impossible to bear the tardiness of her fellow-travellers any longer; and when presently a wayside duck-pond gave her space in which to pass, she set spurs to her horse. So crying, "*Pardon, mes pères, je me sauve!*" and splashing through the edge of the pond, she made her escape, and lumbered off at a heavy canter.

She heard the friar cry out behind her; but her bolt was shot. The rolling canter of her steed shook her uncomfortably, but she never gave him pause until an arched gateway on her right proclaimed the entrance to a range of conventual buildings, at one end of which she saw the signs of building, where lay-brothers, attired in white serge smocks, were at

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work on walls that appeared to have been recently burnt. "The White Abbey!" she cried, wondering to observe no stir of horse and horseman suggesting festival.

The gate stood half-open; toward it a short-frocked monk was driving two cows. There was no indication within the close that anything but the ordinary workaday routine was forward. Half-a-dozen words with the monk told her that neither her father nor other guests were here. Probably he was at Llangolman.

"For," said he, "the Holy Father is giving a feast to lords and squires there to-night at the old monach-log!" (monastery).

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CHAPTER VII

RHOSSER THE WILD

IT was fairly dark when she rode her flagging horse through a pretty hamlet and sighted beyond it a triple row of torches blinking beneath the trees. Their light helped her as she drew nearer to distinguish the dark walls of the Abbot's new barn, looming up like a great church—such a barn as she had never believed possible. Here to-night Abbot John, whose guest-hall at the abbey had been destroyed by fire a few days earlier—was feasting his Welsh neighbours into amity, and his Norman friends and cousinry into increased good-will, ere the final solemn ceremony of consecrating it to the Church and its tithes on the morrow.

A servitor helped her to dismount, and took her horse; and she made her way through an inner paling toward the great barn doors. So far all went well, but she tried in vain to enter. She had to wait some favouring moment; and while she waited she was mortified to see the two clerics she had run away from, who must have found a shorter way

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hither then herself, pass in before her. She might have addressed them, but she feared those eyes of steel. Profiting by their manner of entrance, however, she succeeded in gaining the ear of an irritable little gentleman bearing a silver-topped black wand, who, in his function of usher, held the door. But he, bluntly as might be, refused her entrance.

"The guests are in, the guests are in," he kept saying. "Who are you? You are a boy. This is no place for boys. And if you are not a guest, for me you are nobody. Go away!"

She retired then to a short distance, where three elms guarded a narrow wicket. If Rhosser was really within, he would recognise her whistle. So she whistled the Rhôs signal, first softly, then more loudly. She waited, but nothing resulted; and she went back to the doors. The usher, on seeing her, repelled her more rudely than ever.

But as she was turning away disconsolate, all was changed through the intervention of a handsome, smiling personage, with locks awry and a flushed face, who took possession of the usher's wand with one hand, put the other over that little busybody's round, oracular mouth, and with an assumed air of gravity, solemnly waved Luned in through the huge doorway, over which hung a black curtain spotted with silver stars.

"'Tis my young nephew from Oxford, I swear!" he said. "'Tis young Gil. Come, kiss me, Gil!"

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Happily Gil escaped the kiss, and hastened up the side of the tables, pursued by her quasi-uncle only so far as the nearest wine flagon. But all the way she had to run the gauntlet of lifted and proffered wine-cups, which she—delicate and gracious of form, a creature of innocent eyes—avoided with so frightened a mien, that more than one guest, soberer than the rest, turned to gaze after her. And indeed, it was no scene for an innocent maid.

A raised threshing floor served as a dais, and was furnished with a cross-table lit by superb silver candelabra, borrowed from the neighbouring Abbey for the occasion. But the lower end of the barn was full of dusk shadow, thickened by the dust of the lime left by the masons, and now beaten up by the feet of those squires, friars, and little gentlemen of the country-side who were not of sufficient consequence for the high table. Overhead the oak-raftered roof hung in an umber gloom, almost as remote as the night-sky. The dais, too, looked remote, and the presence of the Abbot in the black and red robes of a feast-day, with his attendant clerics, gave a sacerdotal and stately effect to the scene. But, like his guests, the Abbot's eyes were glozed over with a wine-begotten ruddy film of drowsy enjoyment, through which they beamed a gracious affirmative smile, as from time to time he murmured, *Bibule, amici beatissimi: ecce vinum!*"

At the top end of the lower table arose the slender

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figure of one who appeared, when she first looked at him, to be a young man, attired in a yellow satin surcote, with long and somewhat scant yellow locks. He held, pressed against his side, a small Welsh harp, whose strings he was touching to a sighing melody in the minor key. He was rocking on his feet as he did so, and murmuring, more to himself than to the company, *pennillion*—that is, improvised harp-stanzas—strange to be associated with such an occasion :—

"And some will drink, drink deep to find delight,—
To course a sail along the coast of night,
That yet may waft them to the white sea-isle
Where Merlin's harp is heard a little while—
A little while.

"And some will drink, to find a darker stair
Down to the regions where the pale demons wear
Away their doom. And some crave fire t'impel
Their hearts in a smoke of sleep to the fiercer Hell,
Where Maelgwn fell."

Some harp notes at the end of the accompaniment reminded Luned of a tune known before. During the singing of these stanzas, she had slowly advanced up the sides of the table, till she stood immediately below the dais, where, failing her father, her glance encountered that of the yellow harper. At the same moment cries of "Euryn, Euryn! eto, eto!" arose.

Was this Euryn indeed? In his face she read a friendly spirit, and she ventured to seek help from

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him alone, of all those gathered about the tables; but while she still looked appealingly towards him, she grew discouraged, she knew not why. But the harper, having ended his music, courteously left his seat, and came towards her with a profound bow. As he bent close, she was surprised to see that his face was full of small wrinkles, and lines which were hardly those of the freshness of youth.

"You seek some one?" he said, in a soft voice.

She told him she wanted to find Rhosser of Rhôs.

At that, he opened his eyes wide—very wide indeed.

He looked around, and then pointed out a group of three roysterers, partly hidden behind the left-hand candelabra. The middle one of the three was Rhosser, and nobody need look at him twice to wonder why he was sometimes called Rhosser the Wild.

His arms were stretched out straight before him on the table. His head, a tawny leonine one, was bent a little, the better to listen to what his right-hand neighbour—evidently a wit—was whispering in his ear. In either hand he held a huge wine-cup of silver; and he drank from each in turn. It seemed he had undertaken to do this for some wager. Every time he drank he said, now "*Coch*," now "*Gwyn*." Meaning, no doubt, that it was the red or the white wine, in either cup, which he had drunk.

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His face, ruddy at all times, was now inflamed and ardent. His smile, if so noble and leonine a visage could not look altogether foolish, was yet too vacant not to be disconcerting. Was he in the white sea-isle of the harper's song, or in the rosy paradise of fools, according to the saying which he himself was fond of quoting:

> "Three cups may give fools' paradise to men:
> And three cups close the gates as fast again."

This was not the Rhosser that Luned had sought. She gazed at him in dismay. His kingdom had gone from him. His eyes were obscured by a haze which she had never before seen in them, and a haze, too, was in her eyes as she watched anxiously the harper's colloquy with him.

It was without result. Rhosser nodded his head, but without taking in anything of what was said to him. Seeing this, the harper spoke to a little cleric, boyish-looking, but evidently of high rank, who sat, arms folded, lips closed, near the abbotine seat of honour. As he glanced keenly towards Luned, where she stood waiting, she saw eyes of steel, and she trembled. It was her late travelling-companion—the man with the voice. He bowed an acquiescence, in response to the harper, as she noticed.

She had dreaded being accosted by him at the

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full feast before these great personages; but there was no help for it.

"He would have a word with you," said Euryn.

Escorted by him, she ascended the dais; but at the last moment, afraid of speaking to the ecclesiastic, stole aside to her father, and touched him on his arm, and whispered in his ear: "Father," and again: "Father, come, or Rhôs is lost!"

Rhosser started round and stared. His eyes blinked at her, then closed themselves as if on some unhallowed illusion. He turned away, turned back, scanned her in perplexity up and down. Finally, with a nod to attract the harper's attention, he said,—

"What pretty imp have you got here, Euryn, with the face of my little Luned?"

Again she leant and whispered in his ear: "It is Luned herself. Howel's at Rhôs."

"Howel!" He laughed with a roysterer's inconsequence, and drained the red cup. "*Coch!* Howel —what a joke!"

Seeing that the figure at his elbow still remained, he looked at Luned again, and started from his seat.

"Where's the blue horse? I've won, Walter."

Walter sat two places away on Rhosser's left.

"Turn the cups up, Rhosser," he said. "What does the man mean? Don't go yet. The blue horse is not under my seat. He is a monster—seventeen hands high. He eats earth as he goes.

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Wager him back against my best brown mare in two more stoups. Wager him back, Rhosser dear."

Rhosser gazed at him unsteadily, swayed about, then sat down heavily.

"Bring more wine—red wine and white wine. Wine, wine—is there no more?" he demanded.

Luned turned away in despair. She could have fallen on her knees and wept; but she dared not betray her disguise, and in such a company.

Luckily for her, the yellow harper had been observing the scene; and his wit was not so much under the wine but that he divined her secret. His wit it was enabled him to come to her rescue.

He stole round behind Rhosser's chair, his harp on his arm, and standing there, touched its strings, and using the same melody as before, sang a very different song in Welsh in his ear; and somewhat like this was the tenor and tune of it:

"And some will sleep, as once Seithenen slept,
And lose a land, beneath the salt surge swept
Into the utter dark. Now, Rhosser, now,
To-night, thy land is ask'd of thee. And thou,
Wake, wake. But how?"

"Ill news, Rhosser of Rhôs: your house is afire. Your sword's wanted:" so a neighbour, speaking still more plainly, interpreted Euryn's song for him.

But still he shook his tawny mane, knitted his brows, and closed his mouth, as if to confirm himself in the belief that he need not attend to these alarms.

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Then the Voice (that is to say, the little cleric) spoke, spoke clearly, and spoke in Welsh,—

"Don't put your tarrying down to your red-and white wager, Rhosser ab Jeuan, if tarry you must not. Wine is a fire, not a sleep!"

Luned, remembering what she had heard on the road, trembled as he spoke.

"*Skin of Seithenen!*" said Rhosser. "I'm hot enough to need none of that fire."

He struggled to his feet. The yellow harper took his arm, and escorted him to a small door behind the dais, while Luned, sad, ashamed, afraid of the face of the little cleric and every face that stared after them, closely followed.

It was very dark when they first stepped out into the night. Everything was still, but if too sultry for a May night, the air was full of the searching sweet fragrances of bruised herbage and hawthorn bloom. An old servitor was fumbling with a great horn lantern, trying to hang it on a crook outside the barn.

"Here," said Rhosser, seizing it, "let me see this youngster." His voice still sounded to Luned heavy and unfamiliar. She had hung back prior to this, but now came forward. The lantern gleam fell only on her head and face, without disclosing her form and attire save as a blurred shadow. It showed her face pale and frightened, and full of a maid's aptness for a good cry, struggling with the assumed hardihood proper to the boyish character.

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The lips quivered; the eyelids flickered like little taper-flames, the eyes struggled and were strained to keep back the tears.

"Why," cried Rhosser, "'tis Lin, my little maid! But what mask is this?"

He dropped the lantern, which went out, stifling its flame, and he caught her to his arms. What followed sounded like a string of sobs and muffled tender words. The harper discreetly withdrew a few paces. The old servitor was grumbling over his lantern. Rhosser called to him to lead them to a quiet chamber. "Tired?" (*Wedi blino?*) he said to her.

"No, no! not tired nor hungry. But truly, father, we must go. Think of it, Howel and his Redhands are at Rhôs. I have been long on the way here, O *fy nhad*,—they may be in the house by this."

"Howel!" he murmured, as if he could not collect his ideas: "Howel at Rhôs! Come." He lifted her in his strong arms, tall maid as she was, and carried her to the neighbouring guest-house, some fifty paces away. It was, fortunately, empty, though in disorder. Euryn followed them to the door, and there stood and waited, murmuring his rhymes to himself. Rhosser set down Luned on a bench, as though she were some tender infant. Then he went to the door.

"Bring a cup of *clarré*!"* he said to Euryn,

* Spiced sweet wine.

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"and a dish of eggs and lampreys; or a Penfro pasty. Here, take this." He gave him a purse. "This is my little maid, come alone all the way!" He added: "I shall tarry here to-night.—What, you will not?—She will not, she says. Obstinate!"

The *clarré* soon came, and a round pasty, stuck full of cloves on top, containing meats and sweets cunningly mixed. A tiny taper blinking in a corner, under a little blue image of the Virgin, afforded a poor light. Rhosser, after a word or two more, promised Luned they would start immediately, and went out.

Euryn, after pressing Luned to partake of the viands, stood watching while she sat, pulling the pasty to bits and trying to eat.

Presently he spoke, and asked in a mysterious voice,—

"You heard those *pennillion* I sang at the high table? Another one has come into my head that I ought to have sung. An' you will pardon me, I will ask you to listen to it; but I perceive well you have a silver pipe strung from your neck. You can bring music from its stops? By St. Sion, I must hear it ere you go."

This as already he was plucking a preliminary chord or two from his harp-strings. After which he abruptly began, and as abruptly broke off, the accompaniment she had already heard.

"No, no!" he said. "I have worn out that tune.

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But this?" He changed key, and began a few bars of a tune Luned knew already. "Have you heard this?" he said: "'tis the sweetest I have made; 'tis called 'Hiraeth Euryn.'"

She started. Noticing the gesture, he asked her: "Ah then, you know this tune? It is long since I composed it. My hand has lost that magic. But you have heard it?"

"I have heard it."

"Can you play it?"

"Would that I could. I heard it but once, sweet sir! Then I caught only the shadow of it."

"I should like to hear your little pipe, if it were but two or three notes."

"Nay, you are a skilled harper; I am but an idle piper, and this pipe of St. Brieux is a witch-pipe which only sounds when it pleases."

"But pipe the few notes you know. I never heard them on aught but my own small harp."

She put the whistle to her lips, and blew. She faltered, missed the stops, finally she captured the same elusive lyric notes she had played in the forest.

"Eto!" he cried impulsively—that is to say, "again!"

She played it again. And so, three or four times over. While she whistled, she kept her eye on the blue image under the lamp. When it was ended, she glanced at Euryn. To her confusion, she saw that down his cheeks slid two tears.

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"Oh, maiden!" he said. "I did not know it was so beautiful."

She gazed at him almost sorrowfully. His divine music, his great emotion, his flushed features, whose youth was gone from them, told a history. Was this the Euryn whose songs and harpings had melted men of iron? The disillusion was but of a part with that other wrought in her by her father's other self, who had feasted to-night and forgotten Rhôs.

A moment more, and Euryn made signs of leaving her.

"I must go back to the high table," he said, "and harp again, or I shall lose the gloveful of gold the reverend rascals promised me. Would you like to hear the little ballad of the Brown Brother and the Ale-wife of Arberth? I am going to sing it to them in Welsh, and none of them will know it is a satire on themselves I am singing. If you would hear it, you must steal back, and stand at the door behind the dais."

But Luned, looking towards the dark outside, nodded without quite hearing what he said. She was wondering—wondering about many things; and she in turn felt inclined to imitate Euryn's tears.

As Euryn moved toward the door, but ere he was gone, a couple of dragging, leisurely steps announced Rhosser's return. He reappeared, his head and beard glistening with drops of water, which he shook from his head with a good-natured laugh.

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He had been back to a horse-trough to plunge his head and face into the water. Now he looked like some wild, splendid monster, newly come in from a wet thicket. His eyes had lost something of their gloze, and he had recovered his natural colour.

"Horses," he cried, "horses, Euryn! Bid them put up our horses, and we will start home."

Euryn went with a gesture directed to Luned, meant to suggest that he would return. Soon a sound of bridle-chain and hoofs suggested that their horses were making ready. Luned went to the door. A bell began to ring. Then she saw Euryn, who was approaching, turn about, and with some lack of dignity set off running toward the barn.

"Come," said Rhosser; "they rise from the feast. Let us haste, little Lin!"

The bell continued ringing while they mounted. As Rhosser called out farewell and they rode off the guests were beginning to flock out of the great doors. They still heard the bell as they turned the corner of a wood and left the last gleam of festivity behind. Luned's thoughts leapt on before. She forgot in her eagerness the scene in the Abbey barn, even forgot the harper; but she did not forget the harp-melody he had played.

Rhosser relapsed for a while into a heavy mood; only rousing himself now and again to ask brief questions as to Howel's raid, the circumstances of her escape and her finding him.

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Suddenly Luned said: "But this is not the way I came?"

"No, child."

"But I left my own horse at Arberth."

"Your horse?"

"Gringolet!"

"Who lent you that ugly brute?"

"A gentleman of Kemes got it for me at Arberth."

"A gentleman of Kemes! Where met you him? On the way to Arberth? And he is at Arberth now? I fear we will lose Gringolet; some Perrot or other will fancy him. Well, you must manage with this beast now; don't spare him; dig in the spurs! We must ride fast. I have other scores to settle with my friends of Kemes."

"Oh, sire," she cried, pulling out the parchment she had had from him, "but he is kind. He escorted me on my way—a day and a night. We were overtaken; he made me his care against them, and I fear Master Griffis of Llanfair is killed. Indeed, sire, he was very kind. See, here is a King's warrant he held against Rhôs, which he bade me give you."

"Kind indeed," said Rhosser. "I defy any Norman to touch Rhôs. Uncle Howel Farf is another matter. He is of true Welsh kind. But the cousin of Kemes! Sir Griffis killed! What, what! It is high time we made our stroke, and began with a raid on his lowlands of Rhôs-in-Penfro." He chuckled at the idea. "A King's warrant, and the King

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tottering. We shall do well yet, spite of Howel." He spurred his horse on in the excitement of the thought, and fell to laughing and talking to himself. He left Luned in the rear. Apparently he had not taken in the full sense of what she told him.

After a while he paused for her to come up. "Those fat Flemish horses are no good," he said. "You should have stuck to your rare red Arab. I am afraid I must leave you at Uchdrud, when I pick up the men I sent to wait me there. You shall ride home quietly on the morrow."

"No, no, no!" cried Luned; "you would not leave your little squire behind."

Rhosser laughed. "Erioed! never, never!" he said.

But Luned rode on, sorrowing for Gringolet, at every pull this hard-mouthed beast gave his reins, and every jolt he caused her by his ungainly stride. Gradually they got used to the darkness. Puffs of cooler air, scented by the blossoming apple-trees under a house that stood, closed and silent, off the wayside, reminded Luned of summer nights at home. And again she shivered as she thought of her mother, and of Howel's wickedness, and Sir Griffis's death, and Euryn's weakness. As for her father, he lived in another world altogether than that she had known hitherto—a world of tumult, and wild riot, and sudden death. The night wind caught a heavy sigh on her lips, as she thought of these

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things, and with that sigh seemed to carry away the last breath of her childhood for ever.

In this mood she rode on, until it was abruptly changed by a loud barking of dogs, who rushed furiously out from the gate of a quiet farm-cote. Luned could not help a slight outcry. The beasts reminded her of those terrible hounds of Howel's.

Rhosser reined up, calling to the dogs, which slunk off. Luned, in excuse, began to tell him about the hounds.

"So he laid his hounds on to you, little heart!"

"No, on to Malen; but they came after me."

"*Croen Sathan!*"* he muttered, driving his spurs into his horse. "Lowry ought to have let slip Bran and Abran at them. Come,—I would we were at Rhôs."

Was he roused at last? Luned was pleased to find in him the spirit she had longed to see. She seemed to draw a freer breath again, as she urged her lumbering horse along behind. The sultry air of the lower lands had changed into one filled with cool currents, that suggested rain, perhaps storm.

They had come to the skirts of a moor, which lay, pale and indeterminate, about them. Rhosser called out something to her that she could not catch. But she saw that they were verging on a boggy track; even as he spoke, the keen damp scent of the rushes

* Skin of Satan.

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reached Luned, and she shivered when two snipe flew by, piping a plaintive note.

"That is unlucky!" said Rhosser, reining up. "Did you hear? Did you see them?"

"Two birds."

"They were not birds." He spoke with intense vehemence, and alighted heavily from his horse. He crossed himself, and drew a cross with his heel on the turf. "Hark now!"

A wind had sprung up, a cold, humid, unnatural blast, seeming to blow right from the moor upon them, and from on high, over their heads, came a hollow sound, as of some wild aerial pack of hounds in full cry in the upper regions of the night.

"Oh, father!" Luned cried. "What are they?"

"*Cwn Annwn!*" His reply was dragged out of him, in a broken, uneasy voice. "The hounds of Annwn—hunting some lost soul to his perdition. I have done wrong to bring you here. Here, before you were born, was killed Howel's cousin, Gwilym Las. An evil night. We threw his body in the bog. Fair earth-sleep he never had. Let us go back—there, another way."

He turned, and began to lead his horse back to the fringe of stunted trees they had just passed. There he stopped at a fallen tree, and was about to mount.

Luned kept close to him, struggling with a spasm of fear at the thought of the desolate bog, and the

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slain man, thrust still warm into that cold, unholy grave, when again came the sound of an aerial yelping and shrieking over their heads.

Rhosser let go of his horse's reins and fell on his knees, his arms up as if to protect his head, crying aloud, "*Trugarha, trugarha!*" (Mercy, mercy!)

Luned's horse started, plunged violently, and ended by galloping off with her toward the bog, while her senses swooned. Unable to control him, she felt herself doomed, and soon altogether lost consciousness.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE CHILDREN OF UCHDRUD

WHEN Luned recovered, she was lying in a broad, low chamber, whose white-washed walls and oaken beams were lit by a candle. Two women were talking in soft voices near the bed. One held the candle; the other was holding up a garment, the grey tunic, and pointing to the little dagger-prick in its back, with many exclamations of pity, head-shakes, and audible indrawn breaths.

"Dear, dear!—to think of the poor maid riding like that, to fetch help, all the way from Rhôs to Castle Arberth, and then to that lonely place where the black monastery is, and then through the black bog. The pity is on me to think of it. Now, Mari fach, who d'ye think could be so full of Satan as to stick with his knife-point a young, soft thing like that lying in the bed? You may be sure, one of those brown brothers, or a friar of the White Abbey it was; and the poor sweet darling riding alone, her heart lifted with every breath she took."

So the good woman ran on in her career of pity,

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making no pause, but putting into her tones so many of those soft inflexions which come natural to the Welsh tongue, that Luned felt silent tears begin to flow out of her eyes, as she lay there listening to the story of her own dangers and sorrows, and realising herself as she was, in the dread of the black bog, or seized by the grim terror of Sir Griffis's death.

But Hannah continued, now softening her tone a little more, as some movement from the bed caught her ear. A wave of pleasant weariness again flowed over Luned's senses with the quiet rise and fall of the words, and ere the first of the succeeding sentences was ended, she was fast asleep.

"'Deed now, Mari fach, I was wondering to think of Mistress Lowry of Rhôs sending out her little daughter, such a mockery of a maid, riding all about the country, with a goblin hiding in a tree and waiting to whip her nag here, and a brown brother coming at her there! 'Tis a mortal thing as I can think of,—it makes my hair feel like straws. Hark ye, Mari, what was that?"

In reply Mari showed signs that she felt her turn had come to express her sympathies. But, "No, Mari fach," said Hannah, "your voice is so harsh with that old *peswch* (cough) you have since last Martinmas, you better come downstairs; for once you begin you never know when to stop, do you now, Mari fach? But first come and help me look out coat and petticoat for the poor maid. She sha'nnot

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ride out from my house as she came hither, drest up like a Frankish tumbler, on his way to the Lampeter games. So come, now, Mari fach, bring out the hose and things, and I'll take the tunic. 'Tis sad to think of Rhosser too. You didn't see him at the doors last night. Like a wild man he did look, 'deed he did, and wild he is, and like to be wilder. They do say Howel Farf is in with the De Spencers, and will get a fief on Rhosser's lands. And if Howel doesn't do it, there's the proud Lord of Kemes; and if the Lord of Kemes don't, there's the Abbot of the White-Lands; and the Abbot don't, there's—there's——"

"Who else is there?" said Mari, with some offence; "you are making a long tale of the poor man."

"The devil," added Hannah dramatically.

"The devil? what do you mean?"

"Have ye not heard of that old witch-woman, (*hen wraig hysbys*) that goes about the country, times like a hare, times like a horned goat? Old Mall! Well, I believe she is the devil, or his dam. Rhosser ought to know better than to give her the run of Rhôs. They say she came, flapping her wings like an owl, out of the shot-window there and lighted on Howel Farf's shoulders. But come, let us get a gown for the maid, and so to our beds. You would keep a body talking all night, and there's the sick cow to be seen to again in an hour or two."

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It was hours after this when Luned woke a second time in the low, white chamber. She speculated drowsily for a moment as to what the rafters above her were. Then a slight noise, a suppressed, bird-like gurgle, made her turn her head. At the same moment she noticed that there must be sunlight outside, from the yellowness of the window-slit, and encountered a pair of gentle brown eyes, looking down out of a shy, smiling little girl's face. Three other faces formed a diminishing row by her bedside.

"Where am I?" murmured Luned.

"Don't you know, dear pretty cousin? You are at Uchdrud."

She started up. "Where's my father?"

"Gone—gone, long ago; with Rhys and Dafi and all his men!"

She looked round thereupon for the tunic and her clothes.

"Mammy has hid 'em!" said the youngest of the four, whose name came naturally enough,—Tom.

"I know where they are," said a solemn-eyed little maid.

"But we won't tell you," said another, laughing and shaking her curls.

"My Sunday petticoat is not long enough, or you should have it!" said the third.

"Did—did—you—f-f-fight him?" asked Tom then. Tom was a stout urchin. Red cheeks and a black head wagged to and fro as he spoke. Something

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in the turn of that head reminded her of—whom? Why, of Perrot, Perrot Prys.

"Fight whom?" she responded, thinking of Perrot.

"Him that p-picked you with his p-picker in the back? I would have k-killed him!" he said with sanguinary vehemence.

Luned revived, and laughed a little. But the children were grave.

"A penny, look, a silver penny," she said, on a sudden inspiration, "for whoever gets me my clothes!"

The children looked at each other, then shook their heads, and slowly and all altogether replied in the negative.

"*Nage!*" (No.) In saying this they slowly marched out of the room, and then giggling, quickly pattered, bare-foot, down the stone stair—so Luned thought.

But a moment later the door softly opened, and Tom's black head was thrust in sidewise. "I will!" he said. "Mother's gone to the sick cow out there!"

Tom was a born conspirator. When Hannah had seen the unlucky cow die, and was emerging from the cow-house, she saw, to her astonishment, Luned fully dressed in hose and tunic, riding out of the gate on a Welsh pony. (Her great horse of last night had been taken by one of the men who joined Rhosser.) Hannah called to her in a shrill voice

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to stop; but Luned only cried, waving the switch Tom had given her, "Far'well, far'well!"

A row of four children stood on the long turf dyke watching her ride away. Tom, as he tucked the penny tight into his fist, called to her, "I wish't I were goin'. Kill 'em, k-kill 'em all!"

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CHAPTER IX

THE CHAPEL IN THE GLYN

WHEN Luned waved her farewell to the children of Uchdrud, it was the hour when the forest birds have already long ended their early matins and taken seriously to earth's affairs, worm-dibbing and the rest—that is to say, it was nearing the morning prime. All the way, by the forest-side of Bargoed, the cuckoo called to her, while the glossy blackbirds darted like aerial black fishes in and out of the small trees and hazels, with the unctuous chuckles which accompany their particular raptures of the chase. Passing under the half-leav'd tent of a huge oak, Luned saw a red doe and her fawn cross a shy glade. The wood was full of the calls and twitterings of happy furred and feathered creatures over-bubbling with excess of spring, and their spirit helped to give her courage. Was this happy green region to be troubled by swords, and taken from its ancient people, and stained with blood? Was the world all wicked—one part coveting, and plotting against, the other? Might Rhôs not even now be

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taken from Rhosser, wrested from him by Howel Farf and his powerful friends? No, no! It could not be.

But she was drawn from such thoughts by her nearer concern at the want of any path, such as her father might have taken. Presently she heard a running water, and three pitiably lean cows appeared, spoiling the forest harmony by their plight. They were following the bank of a stream below. An old herdsman slowly drove them with the aid of a dun-coloured cur. The cur looked starved; the herdsman was leanest of all,—lean and grey, and curved like a quarter moon. He carried a long ashen crook much cut about with notches (showing his herdsman's simple calculations), and on this he hung and rested his weight. But he straightened himself, like a loosened springe, with marvellous alacrity when she accosted him, and he answered her in a voice full of a sharp strength, surprising in one of his worn-out, attenuated aspect. Her first question was of her father, and whether she was far from Rhôs.

"R-r-rh-ôs?" he said, rolling the word on his tongue: "there isn't any way to Rhôs, unless you walk on the tree-tops! There!"—he pointed north-west—"lies *Cors Ddu* (Black Bog); there"—he pointed direct east—"lies *Mynydd Ddu* (Black Mountain); there *Afon Ddu* (Black River); and there," and he crossed himself, "lies Rhôs, and that is blacker than all; and before you get there, trust

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me if you don't meet the Black Hare that witched these old cows! So," he concluded with a lifting of his grey crook as she got on to her feet, "better go back the way you came; "ay, any way but to Rhôs. The devil's at Rhôs. Howel Farf is at Rhôs. The Redhand's on the door of Rhôs. Myself know Howel's ways. I smell blood and smoke when I think of him." The old man sniffed the air as he said it, and added: "Would I wonder if Rhôs was afire now?"

With that, giving a cow a blow with his crook over her lean flank, he went on his way towards a broken building that showed through the trees.

Luned was too discouraged to follow him and seek further aid or advice, especially as she saw his evil-looking dun-coloured cur run in and out of a brake, and then disappear suspiciously in the trees, as if for a flanking movement. She could see nothing of her horse; but she fancied she heard hoofs in the heart of the wood.

She took a footpath in that direction, which climbed over a knoll, and then led across a rough clearing of an oak wood, and so reached a hollow where a neglected chapel stood guard over a small desolate graveyard.

Around the graveyard ran an old wall, entered by a broken wicket beneath a yew-tree which spread itself there like a spot of night, so dense and sombre was its shadow. But one gleam of sun, piercing

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through it, found something tawny and akin to itself beneath the tree—a horse surely, and of a ruddy, unusual hue. A few steps further down and Luned was better able to see under the yew branches; and then she cried out in an ecstasy of surprise,—

"Gringolet!"

Upon hearing her voice, the eager creature, for it was he indeed, struggled and broke away from the wicket where he was tethered, and came trotting up to her, a cross-bar of the broken wicket dangling from his rein.

He was quite wild at finding her; thrust his nose into the fold of the tunic, walked all round her, and whinnied, and then drew deep sighs for pleasure, like any human being, as she threw her arms about his neck and fell to caressing him.

The noise of this meeting brought to the door of the chapel a boy in blue doublet and speckled blue and white hose, who ran out to the gate with a soft "Halloo!"

"Why, 'tis Perrot!" she cried.

He took her two hands as she spoke, and looked up into her eyes with the utmost child-like frankness of pleasure. They sat in the broken wall of the graveyard beside a birch-tree, and there Perrot burst forth into eager, excited chatter, telling of his adventures since yesterday, when he left Castle Arberth. Gringolet, half jealous, tried restlessly the while to divert her attention to himself. As she

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listened, she found her fingers closing on a birch-catkin which had lain in a crevice of the stone since the autumn; she was about to thrust it into Gringolet's mouth when she remembered that graveyard trees were said to be poisonous, and she dropped it into her pocket instead.

The knight, Sir Philip, began Perrot, had sent him to take Gringolet to the White Abbey. That was yesterday afternoon, when a warrant had reached Arberth at noon for the arrest of Rhosser and others with him, on an old charge of treason. Fearing Gringolet would be seized if its owner's name leaked out, Sir Philip of Kemes had persuaded the Knight of Arberth into this friendly action. But not finding Rhosser or her at the Abbey, poor Perrot, who was ordered to deliver Gringolet into her own hands, had set out again for Llangolman and the Abbot's Barn. He had missed his way, straying to the north-west, and so, benighted, had wandered for long hours in an unknown desolate region of lonely moorlands. A gleam from a firelit doorway led him at length to a shepherd's hut of clay and wattle.

"When I looked in," said Perrot, in high-pitched, increasingly excited tones, "I said, Surely that is a witch-wife there. 'Twas an old dirty wife sitting by a fire, in the mid of the floor, and two fierce great black hounds sitting by her—truly they were bigger than ponies, sitting up like men and looking into her pits of eyes. But when she saw me staring in, she

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came at me, quick as a cat, and seized the reins and called me sharply. However she knew my right name, I cannot tell; but know it she did, and scolded me by it. But she took thy little hackney, and stroked his nose, and made all the world of him. Afterwards she took me to the fire; and she told me how you and your sire were gone, and you left behind. She gave me sour brewis for supper, and I slept within an arm's length of the two great hounds, on the fern-bed by her fire. This morning, 'Go you,' says she, 'to the broken chapel in the Glyn, and wait there till some one comes—the Master of Rhôs,' she said, 'or his little squire.' Grey Tunic, you are his little squire, but what is your real name?"

"No matter. Why do you look so?"

"I found the chapel, and I waited; but I was afraid of the graves, and I was sitting up there on the bank, when I heard a noise, and there she was."

"Who?"

"The old wife."

"Malen. What did she say?"

"She said, the men of Rhôs—five of them—met the shrieve with two-score and more by the head-waters of Gwili at day-break, and *he* was hurt."

"Who was hurt? Rhosser? My father?"

"He was not hurt very much."

"My father?"

"They had to turn about and beat back, I think."

"My father was hurt?"

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"She told me nothing more, except that I was to wait here till she came back."

"Oh, Perrot, what will my little moth' do? We shall all be lost."

Even as she said it, the May morning that had opened so fair appeared suddenly to change. The sky grew overcast, as an uneasy shifting south-west wind huddled clouds in ragged masses in all but the region of the north. The sun grew sick and was soon altogether blotted out. The trees became dark and restless about them. The very leaves shivered, as if in apprehension. And then a rumble, that sounded almost subterranean, came from afar, but as if it would say, "I shall soon be near," and heavy drops of rain fell.

They decided to fasten Gringolet under the lych-gate, and take shelter in the chapel. They stood within the porch anxiously looking out. "If we went right in," said Perrot, "the old woman might not know we were here! I thought I heard many horses riding in the wood," he added.

But neither horseman nor Malen came at this juncture. Instead, a sudden blast of the breaking storm swept with fury upon the glyn and the grave-yard. Sheets of water, rent and tossed by screaming gusts of wind, were hurled upon the chapel.

"Aren't you afraid?" said Perrot's eyes, beseeching Luned's as they both looked out at the storm.

But Luned said nothing. Her face, reflecting the

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stormy grey light of the rain-swept moorland, was filled with a pale anguish excited for others than herself. As soon as the storm lessened she would have left the place, but in the far distance they heard a bugle that blew two notes. "That is no Welsh horn," said Perrot: "that sounded like the Norman *Aux armes!* If we go now, they may see us."

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CHAPTER X

THE MADNESS OF RHOSSER THE WILD

TO the fury of the storm a cold mist of rain had succeeded, when they heard sounds of people approaching. Glancing out cautiously they saw that the new-comers were two, and that one, a tall horseman, bestrode a tall black horse. His brow was bound with a black scarf stained with blood, that served to enhance the grey pallor of his face. It was Rhosser. At his side, a friar, tall too, but of a stride quite unequal to the horse's paces, shuffled along in a rusty brown serge frock. Nothing can make men looked so wretched as being soaked with rain. Both men were drenched with it. The man on the horse, however, if he looked miserable, had a fierce and noble wildness, as he rode down to the chapel, that redeemed the taint of blood on his forehead and the dark streaks of wet on his garments. The friar looked like a man unused to hardship, and now utterly wretched. Rhosser held in his hand a naked sword, whose blade touched his fellow wayfarer's gown more than once in their descent to the hollow;

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and this, you may be sure, did not tend to the friar's reassurance.

Reaching the graveyard wicket, Rhosser pulled up within a pace or so of the rough mounting-block, and, sheathing his sword, stiffly and painfully dismounted.

"Now," said he, in a loud, unnatural voice, that he directed upward, looking into the air, "we shall see, Holy Friar—shall Holy Church give me grace? Or is there none for Welsh sinners whose sin is the sword? Let us in, then, while there is time. At the chapel we shall wait till my loiterers come up. I have let down too much of my blood alone to relieve Rhôs. But ere I cross the holy threshold let me add to the sins you shall sain within yet three oaths, earth-death, blood, and fire, against the unclean dog-faced, stuffed and padded shrieve of the De Spencers. May his soul blacken and rot with his dog's body, for the black thing he has done this day!"

Perrot, as he saw Rhosser and the friar approach, had drawn Luned into the chapel; and his childish, undisguised terror reacted on her like an image of death in her own heart. Remembering last night and the bog, she felt afraid not only of her father, but of other incommunicable things in earth and air.

The storm had so darkened the day without, that the interior had the effect of evening, and its gloom would have overwhelmed them but for its one eastern window. In those painted panes, long neglected, mouldy without and within, weather-stained and

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dusty as they were, a red angel appeared to gather all the remaining light into his red garments, and to glow and wax more luminous, in that the daylight around was the more sadly declined.

The pair advanced timidly up the aisle, hand in hand, their eyes fixed on the red figure in the window, which they saw had a sword in his hand, like a sword of vengeance.

Then it was that a more gracious figure, hanging on the Holy Rood on their right, caught their eyes; and it was behind this that they sought a shelter when they heard Rhosser's and his companion's steps crossing the threshold.

One corner of the chapel was curtained off by way of sacristy, and hither the brown friar led Rhosser. The pair, crouched behind the oaken rood, caught hold of one another's hands as they heard him unsheath his sword, and lay it naked on the stones by his side. Then he began in a voice too feverishly hurried and muffled to a tone too low for them to hear the confession of his sins. But gradually the voice grew louder, and then Rhosser, who had been kneeling, started to his feet, seizing his sword, and leaving the sacristy, began to pace the aisle of the chapel, dragging the naked blade over the irregular stones with a harsh jarring noise.

"No, no!" he cried, in reproachful tones. "Who are you, thin shadow, to bid me live, that would die, and die for ever? There are torments of earth, and

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torments of fire; torments on torments; fire on fire; and below the fire the deeps of that hell where the ice of the places of eternal cold waits to perish the heart. And you, pale dead under these stones, do you know the judgment that is for the quick, and all their woe? Nay, not till my hour is come. For one I slew, calling Heaven and all the saints to help blot out his soul for ever; and I cast him in the bottomless bog. Ha! Gwilym Las! are you come —you and your seven sons? You shall not touch me. You cannot!"

Here Rhosser paused in the midst of the chapel aisle, striking his sword, now on the stones, now on some bench that came in his way in the dark. With this were heard softer sounds. It was the brown brother, hastening, creeping along the wall toward the door. All the terror of the scene had repeated itself, plain to see, in his face as, reaching the threshold and crossing himself, he stepped into the light of the grey day, and passing the wicket, swiftly was gone.

But Rhosser within had broken into further outcries, after a pause in the violent blows of his sword.

"What am I to do, Red Michael? What am I to do? I am Rhosser. There is blood of princes in my heart. Every drop of it I will give to buy mercy. It is for my little daughter's sake—her that I cannot spare. Oh, if there is a bloody stain on the heart of Rhosser, his blood shall atone for it.

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But my little daughter, Lin, she shall live, to eat sweet apples and sing carols at the Plygain!* And she shall live to nurse a little babe, and call him Rhosser for love of me, and bring flowers to my grave every White Sunday to give me a little peace. For her sake will I forget the bog and its dead, and for her sake will I make peace with Heaven—and—and for her sake will I have Howel Farf's blood, ere he hurt one hair of her—of Luned—silly, pretty Lin. But who, who laughed? Who laughed at me? I will fight with ye all."

He ended in a paroxysm of fury, that left him exhausted. He was barely able to stagger into the curtained sacristy, apparently with the idea that the friar was still there; and sank down upon a seat within it utterly spent. Thereupon quiet settled down upon the chapel.

Perrot whispered to Luned that they ought to creep silently away from the place. He was afraid, and trembled as he put out a hand to touch her. But she only shook her head, and then began to murmur a prayer, shutting her eyes on the gloom that helped memory of Rhôs, and the sense of Rhosser in unspeakable trouble, to lie heavy on her heart. Perrot, whose hand she had clasped in hers upon her lap, felt a tear drop on it, and thereat drew a sigh that warned her not to give way. She pressed

* The service held before dawn on Christmas Day.

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his hand then to encourage him, and said, "Let us try and sing! Perhaps it will comfort his heart."

When she had sung a first line of an old Latin hymn, her voice failed her. But after a pause, taking courage, she broke into another—an old Welsh hymn to the Holy Ghost. Acting from some impulse of old habit, she dropped Perrot's hand and stood up to sing it, lifting up her clear, sincere voice till its notes plaintively vibrated amid the old cross-trees of the timbered roof and in every corner; and she went on to the second verse:

"Ac anvonet
Mab arglwyd Kret,
Kreawdyr penna'.
Yn hanwyldan
Yr Yspryt Glan,
Glein anwyla'."

As she ended, a new courage came into her veins.

"Come," she said to Perrot. "I must go to him." Taking his hand, she left her hiding place. Perrot would have pulled her back, but she shook him off.

"It is my father," she said. "Why should we be afraid?"

"But oh," said Perrot, "do not leave me!"

Thereupon she had stolen down the aisle, Perrot following, when Rhosser himself, lifting the curtain of the enclosure, stood forth, and held out a hand. "Who is this?" he asked. "Help me out to the light that I may see you."

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She took his hand, felt it burn in hers, and saw that he must be in a high fever. A violent shivering shook him, as, leaning on her and unsteadily shouldering the door-posts as he passed, he staggered out into the porch.

"Ha!" was his first word, when they stood there without. "What hour is it? It is not yet afternoon, and yet I can barely see. Why, 'tis indeed my little squire; but how came he here? How did you come, and how find me, Luned, and who is this youngster? Boy, why do you stare at me? Is my face bloody? There is an old rag-well yonder, under the bank. Its water shall cleanse me ere we ride on. But, by Arthur's Queen and his three black nags, where is my black horse? Has the brown brother carried him off?"

Rhosser's horse was almost hidden by the trees of the graveyard. But the beast was restless, moving a few paces, and attempting to graze a little here and there, and then moving on again, evidently ill at ease in the place. On hearing them approach he threw up his head with a warlike neigh, and, starting off across the enclosure, broke his way through a gap in the ruined walls into the thick ingrown covert of oaks there, and so disappeared from view with much crashing of the underwood.

"Did you see him?" said Perrot to Luned. "He had a front like a black lion. A tremendous fellow. He could eat us."

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Luned had at once recognised in Perrot's black lion the same big-chested beast her father had ridden on their journey to Uchdrud.

Rhosser asked Perrot to try and catch the black horse; but it was useless. They heard him trampling noisily down the glyn; and as the successive tramplings sounded fainter and fainter, the absolute, habitual silence of the place, the dark trees, the sad graveyard, the deserted chapel, grew upon them more and more at each further departing sound of his feet.

"A wanton beast, it is!" said Rhosser. And he called Perrot back, and with one hand resting on Luned's shoulder betook himself to the low graveyard wall and sat himself down there. He was frightfully pale, and he took Luned's hand in his, and held it as if for comfort in his pain and exhaustion.

"Get him some water!" she whispered to Perrot: "there is an empty pitcher in the chapel porch."

While Perrot went to get it, steps of men and horses, and a whistle—the familiar stave we know—were heard. They speedily reached the top of the bank, some dozen or more, four on horseback, armed with long-swords, two long-cloaked, with brass-bound leather caps, and bearing round targes of brass and hide. When they saw Rhosser, they all raised a shout of greeting.

"Hai, hai, hai!—hah, hah!"

Rhosser stood up, raised his right hand at the

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salute, and then resumed his seat, with a gesture that unwillingly admitted his weakness. One of the foot-men in the rear, they saw, was leading Rhosser's black horse.

As the men came up, they ranged themselves in a rough semi-circle about their leader as he sat on the wall, and began a lively debate over their adventure with the shrieve.

"What matter?" concluded Siams. "He'll sleep to-night in bog-water. Rob the Red has five crowns for misguiding him."

This mention of the fatal bog was of ill effect on Rhosser. He stood up, and looked up into the air wildly, and raised his hand as if he would speak.

"That blow he had," said one of the four, Elias Vawr, who had a hawk-face, enormous shoulders and bandy legs, "has touched him close. Come, young squire, let us have him to the sick well, and hang his black bandage on the thorn bush beside it."

He slipped nimbly off his horse as he spoke, but Rhosser lifted his horn, and blew two sharp notes as if in defiance of all ideas of weakness, and then began to call out hurried directions for the relief of Rhôs.

But during all that impetuous ride to Rhôs, Rhosser's energy went on growing, until it was become a sort of fury, reckless and feckless and manifestly that of a feverish brain. When at last the troops drew near, crossing the open moorland

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within a Welsh league of the house at nightfall, a flare of red light showed itself plainly before the walls.

At this, Rhosser cried to the four horsemen riding behind him, and to Luned, to haste; and he cried it in a tone vehement enough to be heard a mile away. And then he went riding on, furiously spurring and beating his horse.

Probably it was in consequence of this wild cry that when they pierced the ring of trees dividing the demesne of Rhôs from the moorland, they found the surrounding lawns to all appearance deserted. But a wicked fire burnt under the arch of the great gateway,—a fire that must have been fed within the last few minutes.

By this, Rhosser, after calling (from some lingering motive of prudence) to Luned, bidding her stay within shelter of the trees, was fifty yards in advance. He rode on at a furious gallop across the lawn, quite alone, crying, "Oh, Howel, Howel! Oh, Howel Farf!"

As he spurred on towards the fiery gate, Luned saw a face at the shot-window in the round turret on the left, and heard her mother's voice bidding him back. But he rode on, although immediately after the cry a quick, spurting shower of bolts came flying about him and his horse.

The bolts were shot at short range from the grove of oaks on the right of the house, but Rhosser paid

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no heed to them. As well shoot the wind. His one idea was to get to the gate, and the fire in the gate; burning there, as seen from Luned's distant view of it, mysteriously and wickedly and unquenchably. But when Rhosser was within what might be a dozen horse-lengths of it, the silence was broken by a crash. The gates had fallen, and lay (partly stifling the fire that had undone them) collapsed within the arch. The gateway lay yawning open across the flames; and Luned's heart leapt, and she cried out in an access, half of terror, half of victory, when she saw Rhosser, his speed unabated, spur his horse right through the contorted flames, so that its hoofs drummed on the fallen gates, and disappear in the court beyond. As he vanished, his four nearest followers, having sighted some of Howel's bowmen on the right, made a swift detour, skirting the trees, to surprise them. Luned was thus left alone, and decided in her eagerness to ride after Rhosser, when she heard a horse's chain rattle close by and a keen, fine voice say, "What young cockerel crowed here?"

As she turned her head, doubting the voice, the speaker was already right across Gringolet's path, and had caught his rein. As the horseman leant out of his saddle to do this, she noted how from his handsome pale face depended a bush of black beard; and then, ah me! she felt herself lost indeed.

Howel Farf had seized on her, howbeit, without

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quite knowing what his capture amounted to. And, as it happened, two more of his men came up, dragging poor Perrot along, just as he had demanded of Luned who the devil she was. She perceived, even as he asked, that everything depended on his not finding it out. So she stifled the sob of rage which rose in her throat at his question, bit her lip, and then, how it was she never knew, but between her anger and her desire not to let her tears betray her and her sex, she found herself making an awful schoolgirl's grimace at him.

"What's the Welsh for that?" cried Howel, smiling in spite of himself, and added, calling his men, "Leave the other imp: this one is better worth awhile. We will take him as hostage. Hold his reins, till I call off my cross-bows!"

He raised his horn, and blew the retreat; and the hubbub of his men in their hurried running and wild hallooing, added to the shouts in reply of those foot-men of Rhosser who were but now coming up, the cries of women and rattling of pails and seething of water in the flames, all tended to confuse Luned. She did not in this confusion at first clearly observe the erect knightly young man, in a black silver-broidered surcote, who had ridden up on a sign from Howel, and taken Gringolet's reins from the begrimed rascal in borrel and sheepskin to whom Howel had handed them. But she seized on her dagger, and would have struck the young man when she turned, as he

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rode alongside, urging on the two horses. The young man did not look formidable, and his eye was even gentle as it met hers; but he said, with a slight bow, "Better not: else——" He nodded thereat significantly toward Howel, who was riding on fast in advance. Luned had no idea, however, of going off so tamely.

Crying, "Help, help!" at the top of her voice, she felt for the dagger the Lady of Llanfair had given her, and in a twinkling had drawn it, and struck the young man's arm with all her might. Alack, below his black shoulder-sleeves, his arms were defended by scales of steel, and her dagger jarred, bruising her own hand as much as it did his arm. Hurt or not, he took not the slightest notice of it; and this coolness of his disconcerted her more than any violence. Howel, too, had turned at her cry for help, and a last quivering gleam of the fire showed his face only too clearly. He put his gauntletted fingers to his mouth, so as to part his black beard and display his teeth.

"Tell him, Jestyn, tell him if he barks he will be gagged," he said, dropping a pace or two, till they came up with him.

They were already making their way out of the ring of oaks that shut in the demesne of Rhôs; and as the fire either began to die down or to be hidden by the intervening branches beyond the covert, they emerged in darkness on a rough meadow,

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keeping on a line with the waterside below the place. Every stride they took away sent further down Luned's spirits; and to add to her discomfiture, Howel, keeping at Jestyn's side, began to converse with him in low tones. Beyond a doubt, they were talking about her, and plotting evil.

* * * * *

At this time, the household at Rhôs were not aware that she was missing. Some of their men were still out, and the startling advent of Rhosser in the courtyard had for the moment diverted all their thoughts. One bolt had whipped off his steel cap, but would not have hurt him had it not been for his sword-cut, that was only stanched, not healed. As it was, it had set the blood streaming slowly down his neck and shoulder by the time he pulled up his horse in the courtyard. The little lady of Rhôs was already out, and at his side. When she had caught his hand, she cried aloud, "Oh, Rhosser, Rhosser man, you have saved us, but where is the little one?"

He nodded towards the gate. "They are all behind there, Lowry. But we must get the fire down, ere the draught through the gate blows it into the place."

He himself dismounted, and refusing any remedy for his own hurt, set-to to stanch the fire. Some of his men coming up, and hallooing across the flames to say there was no water without, he called for spades, and bade them shovel on earth from the grass-plots.

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This, and the pails of water from within, soon allayed the fire, which had only partly destroyed the great iron-bound gate and blackened the stones of the posts and the arch above.

But as the fire died down, the beseeching figure of a small boy was seen running to and fro there. It was Perrot, who had been trying in vain to get the men without to listen to him, and was now gesticulating excitedly across the rank smoke and dying flames.

Rhosser, catching a glimpse of him, divined that something was wrong.

"Jump the fire!" he called across to him.

Perrot, nothing daunted, made a bold spring, and escaped with singed hose.

"Where's the little squire?" asked Rhosser.

"Gone, gone!" said Perrot, breathless.

"Gone!" Rhosser gripped his collar.

"Yes, that devil," he sobbed, afraid of Rhosser's fierce eyes, "that devil with the black beard carried her off."

Rhosser's fury at this was all but fatal to him: the blood streamed over his face. He ran across the courtyard to get his horse, stumbled, righted himself, stumbled again, putting his hands to his head, and fell headlong at last within half a dozen paces of the beast.

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CHAPTER XI

"CHÂTEAU BRANLANT"

WHEN the lady of Rhôs could lift herself from the bandaging and laving at Rhosser's dreadful pillow, to which he had been borne, she called for Elias. But the maids brought news that he and three other horsemen had already gone in pursuit.

However it came about, the pursuers missed Howel Farf and his men altogether. On the north side of the Sarthi, below Rhôs, there is a good league's space of soft boggy ground, with here and there a drier spot, and, riding this by night, a horseman would not easily be tracked. Howel had devised his men into two parties; the second of which, including Howel himself and Jestyn, and convoying Luned, rode so fast that they found their way an hour or more beyond midnight over the Towy and so to Castle Meyric, by Llangadock, with the idea of persuading the lady Cymeida into giving them shelter.

Like the Sarthi, the small river Sawddë that flows past Castle Meyric has boggy as well as rocky torrent-

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like passages in its career. The bog around Castle Meyric was a troublesome one to cross, but they succeeded in finding a passage, dark though the night was. Coming to the castle, however, they found a moat about it, little better than a bog-hole, full of water. Over the brink of this, Howel Farf's horse, being a wilful beast, carried him, and floundering about there, so splashed him from head to foot, ere by good hap it got a footing, that he was well drenched.

"What the devil," he cried, "does the lady Cymeida mean by keeping such a puddle round her craggy walls?"

Meanwhile Jestyn was calling out that the drawbridge was rotten. "Better go farther, even if we ride all night."

"*Pwt!*" said Howel, "we will find a way in. We shall lie snug here as anywhere."

Thereupon he blew his horn softly, and called out vigorously, "Gate, gate!" At first it had no effect, and he grew impatient. He grumbled at Jestyn, who sat yawning there on his horse, for not being more active. "A miser's house," he said, "is better than none."

"Yes; but a miser's bed, full of fleas!" said Jestyn. "I'd rather take a barn in the village below. In truth, sire, 'tis not worth it."

By way of reply to this, Howel blew his horn again, and thundered, and knocked, and cried out.

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After a melancholy pause, a most disconsolate, meagre voice cried from the nearest shot-window in the tower,—

"Who is there?"

"Howel Farf, *myn Duw!* Let us in. I am wet through." He contrived to put a world of mischief into his tones. "Let us in, or we'll tease you out. Threescore of my men lie waiting across the bog."

Some moments passed. Then the same person returned, and the same thin voice asked how many there were with him that wished to enter, and Howel replied, "Three!"

And then it was that a miserable old servitor disclosed himself in the gate, after much working at the chains of the drawbridge, by holding up a lantern with a feeble light.

The drawbridge had more than one great hole in it. They dismounted to cross.

"Where's your sweet lady, Mistress Cymeida?" asked Howel, as they entered the narrow courtyard.

"She is a-bed, my lord! Fast asleep since candle-dusk, most noble sieur!" said the old man.

"Call her up," said Howel, with a cheerful brutality of tone which impressed Luned profoundly. "I am soaked with your foul bog-water, and we need some supper, and I want to be beguiled by the sight of her fair face ere I sleep. Call her up, you old rascal, and send a groom to put our horses in, and a page to wash our smoky faces. Lord knows we need it;

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we have rid through fire as well as bog-water to-night."

The old man made some attempt, grumbling the while, to take charge of two of the horses, while Luned held Gringolet's head.

"What does he say?" asked Howel.

"He says," replied Jestyn, "thus—he is the groom, and he is the page, and the maid. What a place! *Quel château branlant!* Look at that crazy wall!"

"Ay," said Howel, "the old earthquake did that—the same which bit a piece out of Talley Abbey."*

Stunned by all she had gone through, hurt to the heart by this last wrench away from Rhôs, Luned had barely wit enough to carry off her *rôle* without betraying herself. As she stood at Gringolet's head, trying in the darkness to catch a look of his friendly eye, she saw that he too was dead-beat, and hung his head with an air half sick, half sulky. He was the only friend she had left. What if he turned away from her now?

The stables were fusty to which the old groom escorted them, and when he lighted them to the house, they found it little better. The hall within was cavernous and narrow; its air struck chill as they entered. The furniture was meagre, with no attempt at order or comfort. The rushes on the floor were rotten, and here and there a sheepskin, badly dressed and malodorous, added to the taint of the air.

* Tal-y-Llychau.

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"*Hwbub!*" cried Howel. "What an unhallowed sweet smell!"

A seed of red ash lingered among the embers in the wide hearth, but there was no wood near at hand. The old servitor set a rushlight from the lantern on a spiked stand and lit it, and then set off slowly again, shuffling across the floor, to call his mistress.

Luned meanwhile sat at the hearth-side, staring stupidly at the curved back of a gaunt hound that, after growling at them, had returned to lie as near the embers as it could. The effect of this starved creature, and all this woe-begone interior, was to discourage every hope. "I am miserly and miserable!" it seemed to say.

At length a step announced from the stone staircase the form of a tall woman, with a face sallow and very childish, small and round, on the top of a long straight neck. She wore a rusty, furred, dirty-white Bristol gown, with black braid; and an old hunting bonnet of her brother's covered her curly abundant grey hair, fluffed out about her head. Her voice was masculine, harsh, humorous. She bowed with rapidity, opening and shutting hands as she approached, and then saluted Howel, kissing him on either cheek, with the pecking motion of some unheard-of bird. Then she descended upon Luned, and at the same time began a running string of explanations, questions, and grumbles at being

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called out of bed. Her throat kept up a kind of husky cackle as she talked.

"I am getting old, Howel Farf, getting old, and I need my sleep. To come at such an hour! Why not have come in time for a sewin stewed in Burgundy, or a hot pig pasty at the hour of supper? Now, there is nothing. No," continued the lady, who had completed an inquisitive round of the trio, and patted Luned familiarly on the cheek—"No, nothing, save a dish of faggots and a cold pig's cheek. Daffy, set them on for these gentlemen, and the Caerphilly cheese, and the dried raisins and a flask of Burgundy. What, no Burgundy? Then, the cider, and—and—the beer."

"Cider? Beer?" cried Howel, "what extravagance, and what a feast! But we will eat even faggots, hot or cold, and drink what we can get, my lady!"

As he spoke, he turned to Jestyn with a nod of contempt. It should be explained that faggots make a dubious dish formed from pig's liver, minced, spiced, and rolled up into a little sausage—a poor man's dainty, with more of the savour than the substance of meat about it. During the repast the table was sadly lit by two tallow candles, which had been added to the rushlight, and languished in a couple of tarnished silver candelabra, fitted for twenty great candles. Howel kept bandying sarcastic allusions with his hostess, who was quite his match. Occasionally he ventured a thrust at Jestyn, who

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made, Luned noticed, little attempt to retort. He turned to Luned, who had been attracting now and again the attention of their hostess.

"Did you ever taste faggots before, Master Perrot? or drink 'chwitafad' (small liquor)? Not at Arberth? Eh?"

Luned mournfully shook her head.

"Ah," continued Howel, "you see, my lady, the young rascal is both tired and scant of words. Who would think he was so hot a young devil to look at him? Ran away from school at Haverford, stole a pony, spitted a shrieve's officer, rode, flew leagues, and was found toasting a maid at a tavern at Cas'-newydd. Then they sent him to me, as being a notorious moral guide to youth," and he laughed softly.

Luned continued to shake her head, too frightened to speak, at these fanciful embroideries of her history.

But the effect of this tribute to her character upon the lady was singular. She nodded and smiled at the supposed young squire.

"Ha, but 'tis a *beau galant*," she kept saying, "*un beau galant.*" And presently she rose from her seat, and going to a cornel cupboard, took out a packet of candied plums. She presented Luned with a couple, and kissed her on the forehead, and patted her cheek with an air of approbation, amusing enough to behold. However, Luned in her simplicity was grateful for any kindness, and instantly formed

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the resolution of throwing herself on the lady's mercy.

Howel Farf, when he saw this little passage betwixt the two, slapped the table and laughed. "Nay," he cried: "take care, Lady Cymeida! he is a rascal—will readily steal your heart, and spite your fair face!"

Mistress Cymeida laughed, and her laugh was amazing. Set going, it went through three several discharges of an extraordinary resonance. Meanwhile, her face betrayed no sign of amusement, save in its round, wrinkled mouth.

"But," she said, "but, Master Perrot, tell me—tell me how you came to run away and play the prodigal?"

To the lady's astonishment, Luned instantly left her seat and threw herself on her kness before her.

"Oh!" she cried, "take pity on me! I am not Perrot: I am no young squire: I am but a maid—daughter of Rhosser of Rhôs; it is my uncle and his men that have taken me from Rhôs. Pray give me shelter to-night, and let me go back to-morrow!"

She stifled a sob as she clutched Lady Cymeida by the knees; her pretty frightened face, as she turned it up, was so obviously a girl's, with all a girl's piteous extremity of terror and emotion, it would have melted a very hard heart to look at it.

But Mistress Cymeida had no feeling for a girl. She calmly pushed Luned away.

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"Do not come clawing me!" she said: "do not weep at me! It's no good. Here, Howel Farf, take away the little cat. What do you bring such things here for?"

"Rhosser's daughter!" cried Howel in astonishment. "Upon my sword, I swear she took us all in. By Paul, she makes a pretty boy, too! Here, young lady, don't mind the old woman!" he said, going to her, and lifting her up with much show of courtesy. "You shall be sent back to Rhôs . . . yes, in a day or two. You are tired now, and shall to bed in the best chamber!"

"Ah, indeed!" said Mistress Cymeida. "Perhaps you would like me to lend her my best murrey gown, too?"

Howel laughed, and said in his mocking tone,—

"Madam, your best murrey gown best becomes you: but this young lady prefers as you see a sadder set of feathers! Will you show her to the guest-chamber—which I know for a safe and high one. She has but two or three hours to sleep, and for that time Jestyn and I will watch here. At daybreak we must ride."

"Whither?" said their hostess sharply.

Howel displayed his hands, as much as to say, that is my affair.

Luned's last impression of him that night was, as she looked back from the stair, to see him bowing low, dipping his black beard almost to his toes

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As for Jestyn, by him she felt even more embarrassed. He stood behind his uncle, bowing too; one hand on his heart, an expression, a smile that puzzled her, on his hitherto impassive face. What did it mean? It seemed intended to convey that there was some sort of understanding between them.

She preferred, if anything, the rudeness of Mistress Cymeida, who gave her a push into a lofty chamber, and putting a taper into her hand, departed with a masculine "ahem!" of contempt.

As soon as she had gone, Luned bolted the door, and having examined the window, and found it far from the ground and impossible of escape, threw herself, fully clad, on the bed. She slept heavily, thanks to her youth and health, though the bed was damp and the room fusty. When a thumping at her door roused her, very early next morning, she felt she had only slept for a moment.

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CHAPTER XII

JESTYN

IN truth, if two hours of sleep were Luned's during that forlorn night under the Lady Cymeida's hospitable roof, she was fortunate. The chill of the bog and the waters lying close about the walls made her quickly shiver herself into full wakefulness as she felt her way down the stair into the lower hall. It was the hour of early dawn, and the bewildering chorus of birds in the Llangadock trees served her as a painful memory of those she heard sing every morning at Rhôs. She saw nothing of Lady Cymeida on reaching the hall, at which she was not at all sorry; and she felt only a dreary acquiescence in her misfortune, and read only the certain signs of its long continuance, in their looks and faces, as Howel and Jestyn bade her good-morning. She refused the food they offered, and indeed she took small notice of them, mechanically doing what they bade her do, as the horses were brought out and they started.

But roused at last, she found herself flushing with

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anger, when after a ride of three or four miles she saw the roofs of Llandeilo over the river Towy. She turned on Howel then, all in a moment, crying out angrily upon him before she quite realised what a passion of resistance had all the while been waiting outlet within her.

"Why do you take me away? I want to go back to Rhôs, and so I will, sire,—I will, I *will!* Why do you not let me go home, sire?"

To this demand, Howel replied, smiling, "You shall—in a day or two." And he pointed unconcernedly to the river flats below Dynevor, down the vale, where a flock of deer were crossing. "They are very lean, Jestyn," he said.

Baffled by his impassive superiority, she turned to scan Jestyn. Her suspicions were too strong to let her credit the courtesy in his bearing toward her; but she could not help asking herself if his dark melancholy eye, when it caught hers, really kindled to a livelier gleam, or if the faint quiver of his features was a sign as little to be depended upon as Howel's perplexing smiles.

But once, when her uncle was riding some twenty paces ahead, and a couple of sheep-dogs, who had run out from a sheep-cote, were making noise enough to cover his words, Jestyn accosted her, and to her surprise in French.

"Sweet demoiselle," he said, "'twere as well you humoured your uncle. Believe me, he will do you no

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mischief; and soon I hope to have the felicity of escorting you back to Rhôs. Till then, look brave, I pray you, and careless, when he may speak; and count on me at all times as your most constant, kind chevalier."

Luned did not know whether to believe in his courtesy. There was that about his relationship to Howel which struck her as suspicious. One or two tricks of speech he had, perhaps unconsciously, copied from that unscrupulous master. But his air of reserve and melancholy, again, suggested other things. And now, Howel, who had been riding in advance, showed signs of slackening pace to let them come up with him. After this, he gave them no opportunity of further talk, for he studiously maintained his place on Gringolet's left.

The sun mounted hot and clear, Gringolet's flanks showed a dark streak or two, and the other horses gave signs of flagging (so hard did Howel keep the pace) by the time they reached Llangunnor hill, avoiding Caermarthen town. As Luned recognised the white castle walls over the river, and the water-meadows, she realised how far afield they were travelling, and she grew desperate. She resolved then, if she could, to break away, trusting to Gringolet to carry her faster than they could follow, if any chance at all should offer.

It was three miles farther on before any chance offered. They had come to a high stretch of furzy

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common-land, with a multitude of geese feeding; and in passing one flock Howel's saddle slipped, the belly-band gave way, and he dismounted, calling halt.

At the word, Luned wheeled about, and Gringolet, excited by the geese, became seized with an ecstasy of mischief. The gander of the flock, leading his siffling, gabbling chorus against the intruders, gave Gringolet his excuse. He reared, kicked, trumpeted; and then Luned, seeing her opportunity, urged him off at a wild canter down the common, making for what looked like a secure green by-road, leading off towards a grange by the river. Gringolet, she knew, was fleet; fleeter, if he was not overtired from his late hard usage, than the other horses. But the by-road proved deceptive, and ended in a tangled, briar-grown spinney, with a soft swamp brooding in its midst. Here Gringolet plunged about, and only gained a precarious footing in time for her to see Jestyn coming up in hot pursuit.

There followed a parley.

"You'll be drowned, if you follow," said she.

"That was unwise, demoiselle," he replied. "Why did you not trust me?" He had reined up on the edge of the swamp.

"You would keep me prisoner," she said, with a hot cheek and a quivering lip, looking round as she spoke for some way of escape, "you and my uncle. How can I trust you?"

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"Believe me, I serve you best by being of your escort. Consider it but a moment. I am entirely at your service, but I counsel you, for the sake of your sweet face and its fortune, to humour your uncle."

"Humour him!" she said. "I would kill him if I could. And you—indeed, I think you are a coward, else you would help me."

"Nay, sweet lady," said the young man, flushing in his turn: "he is my foster-father. I may not kill him; but I might help you. Agree now, let me counsel you from my heart, and on my sword-oath, agree now to all he may propose. I will not hold you bound by any bond he may appoint as betwixt you and me."

"Indeed," said she, with her girlish anger still hot in her, "you do me favours, sir, in advance. When my uncle has something to offer, I'll try to decline it."

The noise of her uncle's approach made her end this speech in an undignified hurry. Indeed, she saw no chance of struggling out of the swamp on the other side, and bent low over Gringolet's head, and patted his neck, pretending to soothe him as he plunged, splashing the mud and water far around. As she extricated herself and Gringolet, she thought it wise to say for Howel's edification: "The geese frightened my hackney, and he bolted."

"Pigsny!" said Howel, dropping behind a few yards, out of her earshot, to speak to Jestyn. "She rides well; she is a splendid minx. I love her, by

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King Ned, I do! She is too good, Jestyn, for you. But she sha'nnot slip me. A maid of spirit—ay, too good for you, and too good to waste in the wilds of Rhôs. Come, Jestyn—this is your chance, you and she must be wed ere to-morrow night!"

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CHAPTER XIII

ST. ISHMAEL'S

WHEN they had gone perhaps a league farther, keeping to the high ground above the Towy, Howel despatched Jestyn on in advance with some message at whose purport Luned could only guess. During the remaining part of her ride with Howel Farf, that is, after Jestyn had left them, Luned found herself struggling against a sense of the urgent power the man had over his fellows. His calm, hard-set eyes, every glance of them; the set of his head; the trick of his hands—all gave one the uneasy idea that anything he cared to do he could do. Luned began to understand Jestyn's manner to him, as of one who had always been used to wait upon a more determined will than his own. But she could not know, nor allow for, the whole manner of Howel's mastery of one young enough to be his own son, from a boy up—all the ingenious hourly control of his doings. Something of this she began to divine. Then, thinking of Jestyn, she feared for herself. What was Howel's next step? She had half heard his words

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about marrying her out of hand. She would have put a final question to him, had she dared; but every time she met his bold eyes, and the smile, baffling, humorous, self-conscious, which set his teeth gleaming white from his black beard, she flinched, bit her lip, and kept silent.

But saying nothing, she thought the more on her predicament. As they advanced, keeping always to the higher ground, and well away from the main road skirting the riverside, on their way toward the mouth of the Towy; and when she saw the reach of the estuary gleam white at full tide, and in the distance, across the river, the towers and walls of Llanstephan, she felt that her chances of escape dropped pitifully away. At last, thinking of Howel's threat, she set her teeth, and said to herself, "I will die, before——"

He interrupted her, almost as if she had spoken aloud.

"Don't look so grim at so good a sight, little niece. These lands may yet be yours. If I'd save you from the wilds of Rhôs, why is it? Because Welsh must be Norman now, and use Norman swords. Because half Towy may be mine, and what is mine is Jestyn's, and what is Jestyn's may be yours—ay, yours, silly, misconceited maid that you are. Instead of those dull meadows of Rhôs——"

"I love Rhôs!" she broke in, with much anguish and more girlish spirit and high-temper in her tone.

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"Ay, your hackney loves moor-hay—till he tastes trefoil. God save you for a goose. I offer you swan-feathers and a noble river to swim upon; and a Norman great house or so—in truth, castle; ay, a couple! But you refuse 'em, you prefer your goose-run and puddles. Do you know, sweet fool, that your father, Rhosser, is mad—mad, and unfit to hold his own? Do you know——"

"Kinsman!" said Luned, her face flushing with the same ardent spirit that shone in her eyes and made her lips into the trumpet of her girlish courage, "I know you to be wicked, or you would not have carried me away. I know you would as soon hurt as think of helping me; and you may hurt me, but you cannot make me marry; and you may work for my father's destruction, but you cannot part Rhosser from Rhôs, while mother is herself and I am I!"

"By Ned! little niece, I love ye for your spirit," he replied to this, and speaking heartily—"love ye far too well to let ye rot at Rhôs. As for hurting you, you shall do nothing against your own fancy. Do you know that warrants are out for the arrest of your father—ay, for the razure of Rhosser's house and the seizure of Rhosser's lands, and the prisoning of Rhosser's household, under attainder of high treason; and this under the hand of the King himself?"

From red, Luned turned to white, remembering the roll of parchment the gentleman of Kemes had

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given her. It was still safe in the folds of her tunic.

"And now," said Howel Farf, "it rests with me—and you, to save Rhôs, or to let it sink. In Llanstephan walls are men enough to overrun all Elfed. To-day they go, under warrant, to Rhôs, unless you love it well enough to save it."

"I cannot save it. Oh, how can I save it?"

"Very simply. Only by changing the tunic for a gown, and kneeling in the chapel of St. Ishmael's this day, or—well, I give ye till to-morrow. To-day you shall tarry at your own pleasure with the silent sisters of the little convent-house not a league from this. The lady Anna of Kidwelly shall lend you a choice of rich gowns, and maids, and a page; and to-morrow——"

"To-morrow?" she said, approaching nearer and scanning him with a solemn intentness that made him smile and turn away, "To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, niece, you shall be betrothed at the altar to Jestyn."

"But if the warrant were given up?"

"To whom?"

"To me."

"To you, you minx. What then? We know the gist of it. Its fellow lies at Caerdyth. The fire once lit, the candle may out. Hark, d'ye hear?"

It was a distant sound of horns, blown in triple blasts—the Norman muster-call—within the towers

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of Llanstephan. To Luned's ear it came as a gaily malicious sound, carried lightly over the bright, broad reach of sands and waters. It turned this uplifted sheep-run, where they threaded the gorse in the hot sun, driving a few ewes and bleating lambs before them, into a place of omen.

She bent her head as she listened, afraid, confused at the issues Howel presented to her. He took it as a sign that she was convinced. At any rate, he said nothing more. They rode on a couple of miles in silence, then he led the way to the left, skirting a birch wood, till they came upon a stream, that a little lower down had burrowed for itself a shy passage to the sea through a wooded sea-glen.

Here, within a space of St. Ishmael's, lay a small conventual house, where the dingle widened, and opening to the sea, provided a green space for its plain quadrangle. Within its harbourage a small band of sisters resided, their only secular employment to gather the crimson and white and amber-hued sea-pebbles on the beach below and polish them to make sets of beads for the pious. Sometimes for months together the sisters would see no visitors, save such wayfarers as might ask an alms; for the house lay off the main highway.

To-day, soon after matins, two of the sisters were passing through the narrow cloister, when one said: "I see five sea-gulls light in the garden close; that means five visitors."

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And truly, long before noon and Howel's invasion of the place, two horses were heard approaching; on the first rode a lady in a black habit and black veil, followed by a groom. The lady, although disguised by the dust of the way and a heavy veil, was seen to be young and tall and beautiful. But she showed a face which, despite its graces, was distraught and sad, and she sank, exhausted, on a seat in the lobby, when, after the customary parley, she was admitted. The occasion of her coming was gathered not from herself but her red-faced groom, who, in reply to the surly gardener and gate-porter, afforded the information in his own way.

"Well, if ye will have it, the Lord of Llanfair, Sir Griffis, is some three days or more killed; and my lady, some do say, is to blame: but not she, I say. But hither hath she fled—fled from herself, that is; for there is none else she should flee from. Nun's bread and sour milk, gardener, will bring her to. For me, I am to ride back, I believe, whence I came; but I saw the wine-bush we passed near Llanstephan ferry. There I shall stay, by grace of St. Ishmael, and get drunk enough to forget the dust I have eaten on the way thither, and the grits that seem, old master, to keep your teeth on edge."

* * * * *

It was full two hours later when another horse cantered down the quiet road to the gate. The horse was a handsome grey, the rider appeared to be a

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young man of rank. The sisters trembled as he stopped without; for they thought of the lady within, and divined a pursuit.

One of the sisters, speaking to him through the grating, noted his fine black moustache, with ends twisted like a glossy, black, curled feather, upon either pale cheek; and his courteous voice. His errand was extraordinary, albeit unconnected with the lady within. When the sisters hesitated, one word won them over; and that word—Howel Farf! For the horseman was Jestyn; his mission was to secure a lodging for Luned within the walls.

Whatever idea the perturbed and terrified sisters were led by him to form of Luned, they were kind when she arrived, and not more inquisitive than went with their fluttered feminine solicitude for her.

She had felt a pang at resigning Gringolet into Jestyn's hands at the gate; and her relief on escaping from Howel for a time, by entering the wicket, was tempered by forebodings.

She drew a long sigh, shivered, and shook her shoulders, once and again, within the grey tunic; then surprised the sister waiting there by grasping her hand feverishly as she was being led into the garden.

As she passed the gate, her last glimpse was not of Howel, but of Jestyn, who stood stroking Gringolet's mane, and looking towards her with an anxious, troubled smile.

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Within, a pleasant, green close led to an arched door in a very low wooden cloister, trellised. Unglazed window-openings, also filled with loose trellis-work, and an open door, proclaimed a cool, shady apartment, which they entered. Its floor was covered with green rushes, and branches of May were fastened above the hearth, where, instead of a fire, a jar of white lilies stood.

A small childish-looking sister came from the adjoining apartment, and took both Luned's hands.

"Peace!" she murmured in a gentle voice, in Latin; adding *Croesau!*" (welcome) in Welsh, and not a word more.

The voice fell soothingly on Luned's ears after the heat of the way hither and the terrors amid which she had had to move continually of late; she felt she had entered a haven in which there might be peace indeed.

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CHAPTER XIV

EFA

AS she stood in the lobby of the house at St. Ishmael's, while its cool pleasantness was beginning already to calm her thoughts, Luned was disconcerted when a dignified little Prioress in white, her bearing and imposing coif at odds with a shy face, came forward, to read a shocked expression in her eyes.

Luned's troubles, and all the explanation of them, were ready to leap to her frank lips, as they would have done, a year ago, in the convent of St. Brieux. But ere she could begin the tale, the white Prioress said, "You are welcome to St. Ishmael's, but you will wish to change your dress while you cleanse the dust of your journey, before you eat." And she pointed to a humbler sister, waiting to escort her to an upper room.

But Luned, recognising that Howel Farf's hand was in all this, saw clearly that, if she relinquished the grey tunic, her last hope of escape would be gone. Wondering what to do, she was struck at seeing from

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a window in the stair they ascended a lady in black (all the sisters wore white) kneeling in a tiny chapel below. One step more of the stair, and she would have passed from the opening; but her mind was so wrought upon by the kneeling figure, that she stopped involuntarily. It was the face of Efa, as she had last seen it on their parting at Llanfair, three days ago, that then recurred to her.

However, before she could make sure of the impression, the winding stair had carried her on, and so into a small, bare, bedchamber, lit by another trellised unglazed window. A stool and a narrow pallet with a white coverlet, were the only furniture. Upon it was laid a change of raiment, a plain black robe, a blue petticoat. On the stool were towels and a ewer of water. Beyond cooling her face and hands in the water, she did not make use of the things that had been left.

Left alone, she sat on the edge of the bed. Soon her thoughts grew into sleepy ones. Dusty roads, and hot, grassy commons, and green lanes, made a kind of drowsy imagery, that slowly slid past her, as if she was still on horseback. Presently, before she knew what had happened, she had curled herself up (forgetting her dusty riding boots) on the white bed, and dropped into a deep sleep. It was her good fortune that she could sleep so easily, and so forget herself and her troubles.

She woke, hearing a knock on the door, and this

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time there was no mistaking the apparition. It was the lady of the chapel who stood at the door, and the face was a deliverance, and made Luned cry out, "Efa!"

It was indeed the Lady of Llanfair. The serene light of her face was dimmed and clouded now, and its pallor was enhanced by the plain black robe and dark purple kerchief that she wore. She gazed in a kind of wonder upon Luned, and then embraced her open-armed, crying, "Oh, child, my poor, pretty Luned!"

The simple sisters were astounded at the meeting of the two hapless creatures,—their cries, caught in one another's arms; their pity for each other; their exclaiming over all that had passed.

To all the Lady of Llanfair's questions it seemed there was only one answer, Howel Farf! Howel had snatched her away from Rhôs; he had sent her here; his hand over her was like the hand of fate.

"He did not take away your silver pipe?" said Efa. "It may serve you yet." And Luned showed it hanging safe within the fold of the grey tunic.

The Prioress came softly into the room as Luned was telling her adventures and turning her back to show the small dagger-stain in the cloth.

"Howel Farf?" echoed the Prioress, approaching the pair. "You know this demoiselle then?" She drew Efa aside, and whispered: "He has sent her

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here for safe keeping. A headstrong maid, a runaway, he said. His kinswoman! There is some mystery."

The Lady of Llanfair smiled and shook her head. "No, no, poor child; she has but flown, as the wind blew her, to save house and home. Sir Crow has trapped her. He has no kindness for kin or country. Now that he is leagued with the De Spencers, he will seize all he can—lands, houses, gentlewomen, tender maids. See this dagger-prick. He would destroy all, if he could. 'Tis we, poor women, who must fight for the old land, I think. The men, save only one or two—Ivor and Rhosser, and a lord or so in Powys, and one or two in Eryri—care no longer to strive. The princes are all gone. Indeed," added Efa, with a softer voice, "I prayed for you but now in the little chapel below. See now, if my prayers will not be like white birds about you. But what does Sir Crow think to do?"

Luned put her hands over her face. "To wed me to his ward—to-morrow. Would that I were dead instead!"

"To-morrow, child, to-morrow? Then we must see that you are gone before my lord Howel returns."

"He will burn the house about us," murmured piteously the little Prioress.

"He will do nothing to a religious house. And we will innocently confound him. Yes, we will flatly

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declare it was no maid but a bold boy he sent here, and one that boldly defied us."

Luned smiled and anxiously scanned the face of the little Prioress.

"But how can she escape? They will take her. We have no horse."

"If I know Rob the Red, mine are still at the hostelry by the ferry-side," said Efa. "Here is a silver piece for your gardener, and another if he bring back Rob and both horses within an hour. Then, if he has wit enough left, he shall escort her to Caermarthen town."

"Rob?" murmured Luned. "Robin Goch?"

But she was prevented from completing the question by Efa's turning away to add a word privately for the little Prioress' ear. This served, for in less than an hour the gardener had brought back Rob and the two horses. On his arrival, any one could see that Rob, if not as drunk as he had hoped to be, had alternated betwixt ale and mead, till he was better able to ride than to walk, and better able to talk than to do what was asked of him. Howbeit, though his service to any one as a guide to anywhere was doubtful, there was no time to find a better.

"If you but reach Caermarthen Priory, you will be safe," said the Lady of Llanfair to Luned, vainly questioning her groom, and trying to quicken his wits and his responsibility.

"If 'tis my lord Howel—Howel Farf—I am game

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to ride far and fast, ay, though I were twice as meady. 'Twould take a lot of metheglin to make me care to see Howel's black beard at my heels."

"What is to become of you, dear Lady of Llanfair?" said Luned, preparing to mount.

"I care not in truth. If you escape now, you shall yet see me at Rhôs." She added the last words of this softly in Luned's ear.

Luned was relieved; she had feared the Lady of Llanfair was escaping from the outer world, and that she might see her no more outside conventual walls.

"But quick, quick!" Efa cried to Luned. "Leave the highway for the byway if you hear horses following. Let Robin go shift for himself if he lags behind. Ask for the priory by Merlin's Tree."

"Trust me to lag, if Howel Farf is at heel," said Rob.

Efa's face, pale oval mirror of all womanly emotions, flashing a hundred unspoken encouragements—that, and the green coolness of the trellised chamber, were Luned's last recollection of St. Ishmael's.

To show his zeal Rob abruptly set off his horse at a canter as soon as St. Ishmael's and its narrow lane was left behind. He galloped a good mile along the green borders of the sands by the ferry side, but at the hostelry there he pulled up, and vowed he must refresh himself against his hot ride.

But Luned said, "What if Howel Farf——"

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The mere name was enough. He started off again at the same reckless pace.

Meanwhile Howel, returning with Jestyn ere they could have ridden more than a league or so, had discovered, after a brief parley, that they had flown. The Prioress played her part well. But Howel succeeded in cajoling the old gardener out, and by a coupled threat and bribe easily extorted from him the story. Thereupon Jestyn volunteered, to Howel's surprise, to take up the pursuit.

"Your only chance," said Howel, "is the maid's little Arab horse. His feet spin like a juggler's balls under him as he goes. I'll ride after you, so soon as I have sent messengers to Caerdyth. Good news or bad, whichever is true, Jestyn, the little maid must be fast tied. For Rob Goch—a sword in his back were a simple matter! I must over the water to Llanstephan, and then after you!"

The good or bad news Howel looked for concerned the doings of the De Spencers, and the danger threatening the King's crown.

Jestyn bowed. He was already in the saddle. "But what," said he, "if the De Spencers go down and the Queen wins?"

"No, no," said Howel: "they cannot go down. They sha'nnot go down. Off,—bring her back here, or——"

"Or?"

"Go to bed, and sicken for a long sleep." Howel

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spoke quietly after his manner at such a time, and smiled with a disconcerting look at the last sentence. But Jestyn only laughed lightly in reply as he rode off. There was a note, moreover, in Jestyn's laugh that disturbed Howel.

"Can his spirit be growing, now that he has a maid to match his fancy?" he thought. It was the last thing Howel wished—to find any one of his creatures waxing independent.

Meanwhile, the horse that was bearing Luned proved still tired from his previous journey, and was inclined to turn malingerer. Rob, too, was mead-fuddled, and grew only more so at every appeal she made for haste. He lagged farther and farther in her rear, until at length she saw he was falling asleep in the saddle. Then it was she determined to ride on; and in this way, being without a guide, and perplexed between the two roads available by Towy-side, she missed her way in her haste. The mistake prevented Jestyn, however, from overtaking her. He passed by, following the direct road on the south side of the river, while she was still floundering about in some farm-lanes, that ended by leading her round a magpie's ring of some two or three miles. Then she reached a sheep-cote, where a shepherd put her on the right road for Caermarthen. Robin Goch had by this entirely disappeared. It was a couple of miles more when she sighted the castle over the river, and the

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bridge—a cheering sight, with a drove of black cattle crossing it to the town.

She trembled for her disguise as she crossed, but by using Howel's name freely and boldly, and saying she bore letters from him, and came on shrieve's business, she gained entrance to the watergate. A disconcerting parley followed with an inquisitive Flemish warder, who delayed her till she had the wit to drop a silver coin in his fat palm. And then, as she rode on, she was alarmed to hear a horseman following, who must have reached the gate immediately behind her. She was afraid to betray her suspicions by looking round. But when she had gone half the distance of the street within the gate, the horseman called, "Hai, Grey Tunic!"

She knew who called, without needing to turn. A dark shadow appeared to fall on house and street. It was her fate pursuing her. She shuddered at the voice, and recognising it, saw Howel's black beard and disconcerting suave smile as clearly as if he held Gringolet's bridle and already stared into her face.

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CHAPTER XV

DR. IAGO

"YOU have lost a gaudy day, and a world of giddy pleasures. Silly maid! where's the yellow gown and the girdle?" So cried Howel, riding up on her left, and laughing angrily in his black beard. "Where are you running to now?"

"To Rhôs," said Luned, turning her face away from him, erecting her head, and speaking as bravely as she could.

"Rhôs? You are in a great hurry, it seems. A pretty boy you'd make—to throw away all your chances of seeing the joyous life about you!"

"I want to go home," repeated Luned.

"Well, then, if you will, my pretty niece—such is my humour—home you shall go!"

She looked at him doubtfully.

"Come!" he said, "you must not be seen in the place in this guise. You look like a runaway. I'll put you in good hands. You shall still have the gown; and to Rhôs you *shall* go."

"Now?"

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"To-night." It rang loud in his positive voice.

"Now is not to-night," she said. "If I went now, I could be there ere night. You said '*now*,' sire."

"As soon as it is safe—after dark. The country-side is in arms; by day, your pretty face would be a mark for bolts. But you shall harbour here till nightfall, in the house of an old physician and gentleman, Iago, who lives hard by. And he shall give you a potion to heal your father of his hurt. Think of that. All the world from Caer to Caer knows the fame of Iago. But remember, niece—for here is his house in the dark gate—he is a misogynist."

Luned was wondering at her luck in being taken to the very man that Efa had commended her to; but she controlled her reviving hopes so far as to ask at Howel's last definition of Iago,—

"What is that?"

"A hater of all womankind, but especially maids. Whatever you do, breathe not a word to make him think you are one."

They soon reached the house; an arched way led to its door within a courtyard with walls newly white-washed. In the middle of each wall was a boldly-drawn symbol, in black paint.

An old serving-woman opened the door to them. She swallowed her words in explaining that the physician was not at home, and looked terrified at Howel's notorious black beard.

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"Then we shall await him without," he said.

They had barely seated themselves within a narrow tiled chamber when they heard a halting step without.

"It is Iago!" ejaculated Howel, rising. "Do not forget that your name is Perrot," he added for Luned's benefit, as he left her, closing the door carefully after him as he went to meet the physician.

"Whom have you there?" asked Iago, bowing

with ceremony, and looking at the door which bore the same symbol as the courtyard walls.

"A patient—a pupil, if you will. 'Tis a nephew of mine; a lad of some spirit, and more fancies."

He tapped his head significantly.

"Boys do have fancies," said Iago, looking perplexed.

"Yes, yes. But this one thinks to play the imp. He ran away from home because his father, Rhosser, would have him study for the Church."

"When was he born?" asked Iago, putting on

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a professional air; "I did not know Rhosser had a son. But how old is it?"

"*Pwt!* ask him. He must to sea with you, and you must sail to-night. I have news that my dear cousin Morgan of Dinas Moryn is ill. He must not die—not yet; and only you can save him. You shall go, and take this pupil with you. A boy's berth aboard my barque—she lies now at the quay—and a boy's lack of comforts, and a few weeks of your plaguy doctrines and Morgan's conversation, in yon solitary sea-house of Dinas Moryn, will bring him to. For 'tis a maidish lad, given to tears and puling. You can cure tears, Iago—you can cure anything. Hey? 'Tis a good notion? An old wife shall go with you, lest they say woman's cares were lacking to the sick man of Moryn, or to the youngster."

"But," protested Iago, "I cannot."

"You can, you can—you shall. Hearken! In that sea-house are all the drugs, scales, furnaces, and porcelain pans and mortars, and what-not besides, of the famous Florence quack who was being carried to London to heal the King's mother. There, at Dinas, they were wrecked. His famous black book is there, and all his sextants, rules, and little ladders to the moon. They are yours, and a thousand crowns beside, and the fee simple of this house; and more beside if you sail to-night and save Morgan, and bring this wanton boy back to his right wit."

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"But, sire, I must see him first," said Iago. "And why so eager to take his father's cloak to your back?"

"His father, Rhosser, is clean mad; and the De Spencers already covet his lands. If his distemper reaches Norman ears, Rhôs will be lost to my sister and our family—and this boy. We must get him away, and in all haste, Iago, as the lad is touched, I fear, with his father's distemper. So, I pray, be humorous, for *he* needs art. Humour him, as you know how, in his conceit—humour him, and call him Perrot."

"Perrot? Why Perrot? He is not of kin to the Perrots."

"'Tis his own conceit to be so called."

He went to the door to disclose the supposed boy at this point.

It opened, unluckily for Luned, at the moment when, seized with panic at the thought of Howel's further designs upon her, and his power over her mind, she had attempted to escape.

She was retreating from another and inner door which she had opened, only to find fresh terrors within—a skull on a shelf, a live tortoise moving on the floor, and various uncanny appliances.

"A mischief!" murmured the physician, looking annoyed. "That is my oratory." He bowed to them both, his eyes askance, looking toward its entrance.

Luned saw before her a slender old man, in a rich

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but soiled velvet gown, its breast all over with pins—little silver pins, large rusted iron pins, copper pins. He carried an ivory stick, with the same serpentine symbol carved in black and white ebony on its top that she had noted on the walls without. His face, when she dared to scrutinize it more closely, was a nervous one; a pale high brow, and pale blue dreamer's eyes, kept guard on thin, irritable, twitching lips.

Howel laughed. "A lad of spirit, you see. Keep your eye on him, Master Iago, until the time for your sailing. Till then, adieu! You will be safe, Perrot, in Iago's hands." And he was gone.

* * * * *

That night at Caermarthen quay, but one vessel—two-masted, with towering, bulging bows—of the three or four moored there, was making ready to sail with the tide. In truth, an hour after sunset the weather looked foul. A gusty south-east wind, with rain in it, was whipping up the Towy, and making the flood current uneasy. When the dark fell, lanterns began to flit betwixt the town and this one vessel.

"Are ye sailing, capt'n?" said the ale-wife at the door of the Ship Tavern, whence a reddish glow of firelight made a track across the broken quay to his ship moored just opposite.

"Why not?" asked the captain, pushing into the passage. "Is the old wife come?"

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"Sitting by the fire there, see, nursing herself. I would not take a keg of the blessed water, worth a hundred crowns a hogshead, to sail with her."

"Why that?"

"Has a witch's eye on her!"

The captain made his way in to the hearth. There, a shawl over her head, moodily staring into the flames, and moving the embers with one foot, sat Malen.

She turned as he approached.

"Ask me none of your sailor's tips or hiring-fair questions," she said. "I know what you want—and I'm going with you, cap'n!" Her voice was edged; she spoke with a mind made up.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"As much as I can get. I heard what the ale-wife said. But I'm a decent soul, and luck is your ship's name if you take me. If not—see this!" she stooped, and picked up a red-hot cinder, and touched the sailor's hand with it.

He flinched, and muttered a curse. "What do you mean, woman?"

"Mean?" she laughed, and spat in the fire. "That's enough, and I know enough to bring you into the black vault at Cas'-newydd! Who fired the Abbot's house beyond Porthcawl, hey?"

"Blood of man!" said he. "Old woman, you have had too much mead. Get on board with you if you would go to Dinas. There's a crown for ye,

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and another every month, and your keep while you stay; and nothing to do for it but tend the old doctor, Iago, and his 'prentice that goes with him, and his patient at Dinas. But don't let Howel Farf see you. He knows ye too well."

"And I know him; but I don't care much to see his black beard," she said, and rising, went out and boarded the ship.

She had barely found her way over the plank and disappeared into the cabins, when, two lanterns being placed on the quay some twenty paces apart to light the scene, as was very necessary, two laden packhorses arrived, whose packs rattled as they walked. The lanterns gave a light poor and flickering through their horn shields, and made the quay and its flags wet with the falling rain look but more dismal as a silent party of three arrived afoot upon the scene—an old slender man much muffled, a black-bearded, stalwart man, and a third that passed for a still more slender youth, wearing—need it be said?—the grey tunic. Luned looked anxiously about, and seemed inclined to hang back.

"Come on, boy!" said Howel. "Here's the horse I promised you!" And he boarded the vessel.

"Where are you taking me?" cried poor Luned, holding back.

"To Rhôs. Come, niece! As I love you, 'tis the only way left. The country is up between here and there. The captain will see you and Iago put

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ashore at Llanstephan ferry, where an escort awaits you, and Iago will ride thence to Rhôs with you, and heal your poor father."

Luned looked uneasily about her. She would have questioned Iago, but he was already gone below.

"All aboard!" cried the captain. "Now, sire!"

Howel pushed her gently forward and then stepped nimbly back. The planks were cast off. "Good-bye, Perrot!" he cried; "good-bye, Grey Tunic. Listen to your master of medicine! and, mind you, his life is pledge for yours. Let him so much as lose sight of you, and his black velvet shall tangle in the teeth of the sea-worms off Dinas Moryn. Hallo, but who comes here?"

She saw him turn, betwixt the two lanterns, as the ship's head, let go, swung round with the tide.

A horseman rode at a gallop on to the quay and right past Howel, whom he did not seem in his haste to have noticed.

"Stay," he cried, "stop a moment." The voice sounded familiar.

"Off ye go, capt'n," cried Howel in turn.

"Stay," repeated the other.

"*Pwt!*" cried Howel again, seizing the horse by its bridle. The horse reared; in the lantern-light Luned saw its rider's face gleam. Then, as the ship swung clear, one cry for help escaped her,—

"Jestyn!"

But then the ship glided quietly out on the dark

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current, and a black curtain seemed to be drawn betwixt it and the shore. It was a small house perched on the river-wall, at the lower end of the quay. She was still staring stupidly at it when a hand touched hers.

"Come, Perrot," said the physician, "it is better below. Though the ship is foul enough, the night is like to be fouler."

She could think of nothing better than to follow, asking, however, as she went, when they would reach the ferry.

Iago mumbled, "Soon, soon," as he led on.

The cabin was full of dreadful wandering odours of bilge and pitch.

"There is a vapour given off in the belly of ships," said Iago to her, observing her disgust, "that is a deep purple in colour by night and a pale blue by day. By night it doth poison the head, and by day the lungs. It is so baneful that women have been known to die from its inhalation. Men, never. This is because the blood of the male is of a more sanguineous intensity. Be thankful, Master Perrot, son of man, that you were not born a maid."

Luned glanced uneasily at his face as he concluded this last sentence. Her sense of the injustice done her sex might, under other circumstances and in her own proper colours, have wrung a retort from her. But now a fresh waft of the vapour, whose properties he had so subtly described, reacting upon nerves

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already over-tired, threatened speedily to carry her into the region where philosophy and its arguments are useless.

Iago was hastily concocting a draught in a small pewter cup. "Here, take it and drink," he said, when it was well stirred with the blade of his lancet; "this may save us both from sea-fever."

Whether he drank a similar draught, she did not care to inquire. Hers proved powerful. Within a few moments she found herself trying to ask if they were near the ferry, and failing, in her overwhelming drowsiness, to collect her words. She could recollect nothing more of that evening, or of the night that followed, until she was hurriedly and uncomfortably wakened from her distempered sleep in the hammock which she had occupied. Harsh voices were shouting above. A chink of the panel in her cabin let a thread of light through. When she had fully roused herself, the unusual stillness of the vessel, and the strangeness and closeness of her surroundings, put her into a great perplexity.

"Come," said a voice; and there was a step at her door.

"Is it the ferry?" she called out.

The cabin door opened. There stood the physician, twisting a black kerchief round his throat. A lamp stood on the floor at his feet. "Come!" he said: "we must land."

Still thinking of the ferry, she was surprised, when

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they had come upon deck, to see a dark, sharp horn of land to right and left, too indeterminate, however, to be clearly mapped out in her mind. But it was quite unlike, as she discerned, Llanstephan water and the ferry there. She heard plainly beyond the two horns, on either side, a short loud surf breaking; although here the water was very still. They appeared to be at anchor in a narrow creek.

The air was chill, after the heavy air of the cabin, and a light sea-mist was falling. Luned tried in vain to strangle her yawns, begotten of cold and weariness, and to keep her teeth from chattering. The physician was closely wrapped in a long cloak, the symbol of the wrapping of his own thoughts, in which he appeared to be lost.

He said not a word to her. The captain was giving orders over the side of the vessel into the darkness there. Two seamen were scuffling trunks into a boat alongside; but to Luned it seemed the captain held conference with the powers of darkness.

At this point it was she grew aware of another figure, standing immediately behind the physician, a mere blacker shadow among the shadows on the deck. Luned saw it was a woman; and she felt in some half-defined way that her presence there was a friendly one.

The physician's attention was also drawn to this figure. He turned and said,—

"Who are you?"

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"I am the woman."

Her voice produced a flutter of emotions in Luned's heart; its tones called up associations in which Gringolet and the Sarthi water figured. "Why, it is Malen," she murmured.

"You are the wise wife Howel Farf has sent to nurse the sick."

"There is no sick to nurse."

"Why, woman?"

"You, who come of the dark doctors of Myddfai, should not need to ask that of me."

"I do ask it," said Iago. "You know the man, and you have been to Dinas Moryn. I have seen, I know neither."

"Wait then; wait and see for yourself," said Malen.

From what passed in this way, and her sense of hours which had passed in a sick sleep, Luned began to divine the truth—namely, that they had long left the Towy and Llanstephan behind, and were at some unknown anchorage on the open coast. She fell into a hopeless feeling of discomfiture at the thought; and when the captain called to them that they must take to the boat, found herself moving mechanically after Iago to the ship's side, which they descended by a rope-ladder. The physician barely replied to the captain's "Far'wel!" as he crouched down uncomfortably in the bows, his chin sunk morosely on his cloak. Luned gave herself up to a cold stupor. She forgot Rhôs, her father

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and mother, Gringolet, everything. She felt nothing but the chill of the night air, that seemed the more keen in effect from the lurking smell of seaweed. The oars had a lonely sound as the boat was rowed in. She was roused by the bump of the boat on the rocks. One of the two seamen sprang out, and up a steep bank of no great height. At its top, close to the brink, and dimly defined by some faint flickering light behind it, was a dark building, upon the door of which he rapped and kicked.

Presently he returned, grumbling.

"Come, sire; come, old missus! We can't turn the tide-top! Out ye come! Come, young master!"

They scrambled out, and painfully struggled up a steep bank of rock and sandy clay to the door, closed, inhospitable, of the dark house above. The seamen carried up the trunks and the bale which formed their baggage, and began a smart battery on the iron and oak panels of the heavy door, against which the sea had so often beat in time of storm.

"Open, master!" cried one of the men: "open, Master Morgan. Here's a learned doctor can ease ye of your blood, and a young gentleman is with him to hold the bowl, and an old wife to lay ye out afterwards. Open the door, master, and let 'em in. They're cold, this warm night."

But the door remained shut.

"Ye need not knock and bellow there," said Malen. "He is not in there at all."

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At the same moment came a hail from the ship.

"The tide's at the turn: come, Sandy!" it cried. "Leave them to shift as they can. We cannot lose the tide."

The sailors retreated toward the boat.

"What are we to do? Where is this Morgan?" asked the physician.

"I'll show ye," said Malen, and led the way cautiously around a rocky path winding under the walls of the building. As Luned followed, she heard the sailors sing a 'shanty' as they rowed back in the darkness:

"Pull, Dewi Shôn,
Pull, Dewi Shôn;
Forget your old woman,
And grumble alone!"

There were other words more profane; but the tune they sang was wild and melancholy, such as was forlornly in keeping with this deserted place.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE DEAD HOST

FOLLOWING Malen and the physician, Luned felt her way in the dark as best she could along the uneven path, which hugged closely the rough walls of the sea-house and mounted by shelving steps of rock to the ground behind it. And there a quivering gleam of light, shot up from earth, made the darkness and the loneliness of the place more apparent.

Forty or fifty paces away, a lantern, its back towards them, was set on the ground. By it stood, or stooped, two men, lighted by it at such an angle that the shadow of one party fell upon the other. What it was they were doing, could not, in this dim lantern-twilight, readily be told. But Malen led the way stealthily, with reverted hands that warned her two companions to make no noise, and skirting a sandy knoll, brought them through the coarse sand-grass to a vantage point which safely commanded the spot. Then they saw that one of the men was levering a stone aside with a spade, and the other

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was leaning forward over a cavity which, by its narrow shape and size, appeared to be a grave.

Both men had a disconsolate air, as if weighed upon by the solitariness of the place and the nature of their task. The one who had been leaning over the grave showed, on raising himself up, that he had a rope in his hand.

"He does not lie easy there, Peter," he said to his companion, in a dispirited voice; "the towel slipped from his face as he went down."

"Never mind that," said Peter, in a voice so deep and thick that it might have been his spade that spoke. "Never mind that. Let us cover him up. Then he won't see himself, or know clout from clay. I wish I were as fast asleep. Let us cover him up and go. God's candle, what was that?"

This ejaculation was whipped out of him by his happening to turn toward the sea-house, and so to catch sight of Malen's approaching figure. She had, on hearing Peter propose so speedy an end to their task, stolen nearer, anxious to investigate the grave ere its tenant should be earthed away out of sight. Peter's outcry called his fellow's attention also to Malen; and now, both alike, seized with panic and terror of the unknown, relinquishing spade, cord, and lantern, turned and ran. Once they were beyond the range of the lantern gleam it was hard to distinguish their flight, as the ground grew more and more uneven, and merged itself in an indeterminate

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range of sandy hills and hollows. But ere Iago had reached the grave in the sand, following Malen, a sound of oars was heard from a neighbouring cove. The men must have had a boat in waiting, and had taken advantage of the tide's turn to escape by it.

When Luned stepped to the grave-side, a cold hand seemed to touch her heart. The presence of death was terrifying to her. Until now, she had never looked into an open grave, never come into the house of the dead. She felt the blood turn in her as, watching Malen lean over the narrow, black gulf, she tried to divine what lay there. But a heavy necessity was upon her to drag herself nearer, step by step, till she, too, could look down into the cavity which Malen was eagerly examining with the aid of the lantern she held in her hand.

What Luned saw there was to her sad, but not terrible. The dead man was uncoffined and merely wrapped about in a great cloak; but the face was exposed, the white cloth that had been about it having been displaced in the lowering of the corpse. Its features, white and peaked and thin as from great privation or long illness, were those of a brown-bearded, middle-aged man. It was turned pallidly up to the light, and had the air of one whose lips are pursed with pain, whose eyes are kept shut with an effort, in trying to sleep. It looked like some face she had known, and half-forgotten. If the eyes could but

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open she would know where she had seen it. Indeed, the face, impassive as marble, still looked conscious. She said to herself, he wanted to die, and yet hardly could he come to it. Thus, recovering from her cold terrors, she was moved to a sudden sob and a flood of tears.

Malen turned to her. "Better go back to the house, young master, while I will fill the grave. He cannot sleep so. Be easy, be easy in your bed now, Master Morgan, and lie quiet. It will quickly be done." She added: "He must have died out here: see, here's the *llumman* he tried to call 'em over with from Abereli."

The *llumman* was a torn white pennon, tied to a long staff.

"He is not dead twenty hours," said Iago; "he called for help. But those that came, came too late. Woman, you frightened them; but I think they were honest fools, though they fled like murderers. They run a chance of murdering themselves in the sea-dark too. But go, young sir, and we will follow. What, you are afraid?"

Luned was more afraid to stay than to go; she went back slowly to the sea-house, feeling as if she was walking all the while on the edges of open graves. When she had found the track under the tower walls, she pursued it to the sea-front and stood at the closed door, and listened to the break of the surf and the lonely, floating whistle of the sea-birds. She sat

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herself down and began to cry softly, crouching on a trunk the sailors had left against the door. Every moment that cloaked form kept recalling her to her father's evil state, where he lay smitten at home: would he be laid away so, before she could see him or even bid him good-bye?

Though it was a May night, the light sea-fret that fell at times made it cold, and it seemed a long while ere her two fellow-voyagers rejoined her. When they came, they came slowly, speaking not a word. They brought the lantern with them, whose light showed the key of the door in the cleft of the wall. Although the sea-house within looked cavernous, and smelt of the sea-damp, Luned was comforted to see in the depth of the chamber a red seed of fire glimmer on the hearth. Fresh kindling of broken ship's wood and tussocks of dry sand-grass lay at hand, and with these Malen quickly made a ruddy blaze that lit up the place and gave it heart and comfort. The fire cast illusive red gleams over the disorder in which it had been left—the cobwebbed stones of the walls, the smoked rafters, the broken and gapped floor, and the neglected kegs and pans and platters that lay about.

The physician meanwhile had taken up the lantern, and was making a partial exploration of a staircase approached from a doorway. This gave Malen her opportunity.

"Come hither, pretty sir," she said, with an

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affectation of being a stranger: "ye look cold; but I'll soon have ye warmed, for I smell something like spilt wine by the hearth here. Don't ye be afeard, my little lady!" she added in a lower tone. "We will spite your wicked uncle yet."

She snuffed and peered about as she spoke, and in this way came upon an overturned flagon under the broad seat of the tall spur, or settle, that defended the hearth from the door.

"Ah ha!" she said; "that reminds me of the wine-house of the Three Salmon at Aberteifi, where there was always a good smell of spilt wine on a cold night to warm your nose. There must be more where that came from. Wine of Poitou, it appears to me. And we all need it, after two days' sea-fast, followed by a cold funeral and no wake nor supper to it."

She heaped on more wood, to give her a better light to search by. With its aid she was not long ere she found a keg in a shy corner, from which she was able to fill the leather bottle ere Iago returned.

He did so with his lantern in darkness. The wind, he told them, had blown it out in a draughty doorway above.

"Na, na," said Malen, with a glance at the door below the stairway: "the dead gentleman is taking his last look round the rooms. The dead host, as ye know, master doctor, cannot abide a strange guest that he never asked to his house."

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"The spirit is glad to be quiet, woman," said Iago. "Morgan Ola' is in the starry halls by this. But what have you here? Wine, red wine: that is good. There is a sea-chill in the house, and we all want a cup to warm our thin blood. Have you cups for all?"

"Here are four, doctor."

"Four?"

"One for each of us; one for the dead man," said Malen solemnly. "I knew him long ago, when he loved a maid and wooed a wife—a young man; and when he dearly loved a cup of red wine."

"Hark ye, woman," said Iago at this: "would you unsettle this young squire's courage with your whimsies?"

But Malen filled all four cups from the flagon, and handing one to each of her companions, set down the fourth on a niche within the open chimney.

"Drink, young master, drink," she said to Luned; "and ye will soon feel hearty again.

The wine ran like a soft fire along Luned's veins as she tasted it, and soothed and encouraged her heart. It was as congenial as the glow on the hearth. She sat wondering at the blue flame that played elvishly about the burning ship's wood, grateful for the warmth it cast upon her chilled knees and feet, drawing long sighs of gradual restoration. With

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each sigh she felt it possible to shake off a little more of the sense of death-in-the-grave, and of forlorn homelessness, which had appeared till this moment to lie like a black shadow over the place.

Meanwhile Iago, having relighted his lantern, announced that he would sleep in one of the chambers above, and bade them good-night.

When his steps had died into silence, Malen turned to Luned, and with much feeling and many nods and bustling gestures and old woman's inarticulate chuckles of reassurance, proceeded to tell her that she would make a bed for her here on the deep settle by the fire. "And so, honey," she went on to say, "I can talk to ye. Ye are not fearing the dead man in his own house, are ye? The dead is very kind to the living—do ye know that? Oh, you need not fear the dead! They are as gentle as the does that run with fawn. And Morgan Ola,' that Howel Farf called Ola', though he knew he was not last at all—Morgan had his hurt from Howel, the same as you, my honey, and he will help ye, honey—we shall see." She knelt with this at Luned's feet, and began to undo the ankle-straps and strings of her riding-shoes. "To-morrow, you must go out there, and whistle up the wind that shall blow you over to Abereli, and help you home."

"But—Morgan Ola', will he come and drink the wine?"

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"I cannot tell," said Malen; "he was a shy gentleman, was Morgan Ola'. Perhaps I had better take it out to him. He was sick this long while; he rarely went out, I have heard say, of his house. But there is more to tell of him. Morgan was not the last—no, not the last—though he thought so. In the morning we will go and see his chambers above. Last time I was at Abereli, the ale-wife told me, when the boat brought the keg across from Abereli, Morgan Ola' said, 'When this is done, I'm done too, and none left to care!' Ah, he knew what was coming while he sat up in his chamber, and he said, when he saw the keg get lower and lower, 'When that's done, I'm done too.'"

Malen went to the door, then paused, and came back.

"'When that's done, I'm done too!' I'm sure that's what he said." She stirred the embers on the hearth. "'When that's done'—— I think Morgan Ola's gone down to his own—his own folk—his other house."

"What other house?" asked Luned, anxious to humour her as far as possible, and afraid to be left alone, even by such a companion.

"There's a city—wide streets, shops fine as Chepe's, and many a plâs and many a tavern—under the sea. That's why they call it Dinas Moryn. And this place—wait till I take ye down the cellar-stairs. Morgan told the ould fishermen of Abereli he had

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a house down there. He said he would go there; and now the wine is out . . . you understand . . . . 'When that's done, I'm done too.' Morgan's gone down to his own. Better that, than spend fretting days here. But I'll take the wine to his grave. Go ye to sleep now."

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CHAPTER XVII

DINAS MORYN

ON the following morning, Luned was wakened on her hard couch by a rosy gleam which she discovered came from the wide-open door. The whole sky was so suffused with a gloriously stormy sunrise, that even the dingy smoke-stained walls around her were become of a soft crimson. She rose on one elbow and looked out, to see nothing but water beyond the threshold. It was as if the door directly opened into deep water, and that water the most alive imaginable, borne on a current which recoiled in foamy crests against the wind ; the waves of the clearest blue, their crests white, tinged with crimson.

She rose and went to the door, and the salt, fresh sea-wind swept in and blew in her face. Her limbs were stiff, her eyes tired, but all sense of the sea-pains she had gone through was over. A kind of exaltation filled her pulses. Where was Malen? She thought she heard her within the house, and decided to climb the stair. As she went, she felt

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that sudden inordinate pang of hunger which to young creatures seems so final. The first door she came to was shut, and she knocked; but when it was opened, instead of Malen, it was Iago appeared, blinking his eyes at the bright light. A dying lamp lighted a small table within, upon and beneath which was a jumbled heap of books, parchments, porcelain jars, bowls and phials. A slit in the wall that served for window was draped.

"The sea and its noises kept me from sleep and has prolonged the night and my studies," he said, leaning against the doorpost with a weary air. "It is but barely five in the morn."

"Pardon, sire, but I am hungry," said Luned. "I would know why I am here in this strange house, when my uncle told me I should be at Rhôs? I pray, let me breakfast, and so home to my father."

"Hungry? Hunger is no merit, young sir; though you speak as if it were. Hunger, like all fleshly desire, is foolish. But if you must breakfast, temper with a stale crust or a bit of salt fish your new bread (it is more wholesome to smell new bread than to eat it), and if you thirst, drink, sipping, a good draught of the nanny-goat's milk that I heard bleat below. Yes, goat's milk is best. The milk of the goat, the butter of the cow, the cheese of the mountain-ewe—these are best. And if the good creature—what is her name—Mali?—shall offer you ale, or flesh meat, or salt fish with vinegar, decline them: they are, as

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my '*Seren Iechyd*'* hath it, the three victuals of disease."

At this point, Luned, finding each sentence pricked with a fresh dagger of hunger, and feeling herself unequal to the task of pressing the questions she longed to have answered till she should have eaten something, sighed so, that he could not help noticing it. He broke off thereupon, saying in a tone of mild resignation, "The advice of the old will not stay you, I see. Go then, and breakfast." So descending, she found Malen carrying wood from without to the huge, open chimney of the apartment, which almost formed a chamber in itself. After greeting Luned she set about baking some flat white cakes of wheat and oatmeal, which she proceeded to prop up in a very inconvenient way with little pieces of stick around the fire. By this means they were quickly toasted, rather than baked, by the glowing embers.

"And there's milk," she said when these were ready. "A nanny-goat in milk came bleating to the door when I opened it. Fresh cakes are good with sweet milk to wash them down." She pointed to the broad settle within the hearth where Luned had slept. "That will do for your parlour as well as your bed."

As Luned ate, she took heart. She said, with a

* "Star of Health:" Iago's famous treatise of medicine, drawn up in accordance with the influence of the planets upon herbs and the human frame.

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determination that made Malen stare at her, "I will not stay here another night. Oh, Malen, why was I brought here? I long to be on the road to Rhôs, on my little nag. And I would take the old doctor there with me too, to heal my poor father. They say Iago can heal any disease, and I think he can."

"He came here to heal Morgan Ola', and Morgan is dead," said Malen, as if that discounted his faculty.

"If the poor gentleman is dead, surely Iago will go back to Caermarthen town, and from Caermarthen to Rhôs: it is not many leagues."

"You must ask *him* that, honey. We will take him some victuals now; and there will be your chance. Does he suspect you are a maid? No?"

Luned shook her head. "He hates all maids, all women, young and old."

"He may hate me, but he must put up with me, if he wants bread to send down his wizened throat," said Malen: "for here he must stay, till your uncle, my lord Black, lets him go free again."

"Howel Farf said he would help heal my father."

"Howel Farf says what suits him. He would gladly see your father where Morgan Ola' lies—under the sod. But come, let us go to the ould doctor."

When they reached his door with a platter of cakes and a cup of wine, they found it shut.

"Bread may go in, when swords break on the latch," said Malen, and boldly opened.

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Iago was standing, a piece of charcoal in hand, by a white lime-washed wall, which was inscribed with curves, lines, and archaic signs. An uneasy odour, as of burnt amber, and some volatile unascertained drug, filled the room. Malen proffered the bread and cup she carried.

"Warm bread!" he said, smelling it. "'Tis unfit to eat for a day. I need no food, woman, but you may leave the cup."

He waved her away. She put down cup and platter and left them. Luned paused; for he said: "I will talk of your studies with you, Perrot."

He seemed about to speak to her, but instead, he broke off a piece of the cake, swallowing it eagerly. Other pieces were as quickly disposed of. The bread disappeared as if by magic. The turn of the cup came to like effect; its contents went at a draught. For one moment he looked round him then, as if for more; but nature having so far asserted itself, he as quickly forgot it and its needs.

He was already growing abstracted again, when said Luned, "Sir, I would leave you to your studies, —but first tell me, of your courtesy, when I may return to my home at Rhôs? My father lies sick with a sore wound; and my uncle Howel said you would send some potion, or yourself go to heal him."

"Your uncle spoke only of the sick man here to me," Iago murmured slowly, picking at his piece of

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charcoal as if in perplexity, but returning to the wall.

"Ah, sir, I know you are wise in herbs and stars, and if you are so great a physician you can heal him—surely you can heal him?"

"I can do what I may, when the time is come," he said; but his voice to her ear was full of abstraction. "I fear," he continued, as if he directed his mind with difficulty to her needs, "I fear it may not be yet." But he turned his head as he spoke; and it seemed as if her eyes, brimming with a bright eagerness that might end in tears, really and fully struck his attention for the first time. The appeal, expressed by her beseeching looks and impulsive tones, might have moved one less sensitive than he to pity. His eye kindled, and his voice, when he spoke again, quickened, till it sounded like an attenuated echo of her own eagerness.

"Oh, young sir," he said, "hearken to me, and you shall be more content to sit in this grey wall than to roam all the world without."

"I do not ask to roam," she said sadly: "I only wish to go home to Rhôs and save him that lies sick there!"

"Home is as much here as there, believe me," said the old man, his pale blue eyes scanning her earnestly; while she shook her head, looking wistfully towards the window. "But indeed," he continued, "like you I came here not of my own will, but at

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the constraint of your masterful kinsman. And yet he, too, is but the creature of the stars, who write in men their purpose, and draw with their starry strings one here, another there. We are their servants, and can but study to know their will, their occultation and decline, their splendid waking and austerer sleep."

He paused. Luned moved nearer him with a gesture of suspense.

"Know," he resumed, "you are free as I am of this place. As you saw, he whom I came to heal was already dead. But for our leaving this place, the sea's toils that were set for Morgan Ola' are set for us by your uncle. But come, see Morgan Ola's chamber, which lies above this. He left a letter there addressed to Roger of Rhôs; that is your father; though why the son of Roger of Rhôs should be called Perrot——?"

Luned felt uneasy, fearing he was about to ask her awkward questions; but instead, without pursuing the subject further, and taking a rushlight, he led the way out of his chamber, up one turn after another of passage and stairway, to a much loftier room than that they had left.

It had but one eyelet window, and this was stuffed with straw, but the taper's glimpse showed it to be furnished for extraordinary purposes. It contained a table finely carved and decorated with the painted signs of the Zodiac. Along the wall stood an array

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of vessels of white and black ware, and a crucible. On the wall was rudely drawn an emblem of a cross set in a circle, a rose at the juncture.

"Ha!" said Iago, "here I am."

His tone was one of extraordinary gratification. He paused, absorbed in contemplation before the emblem on the wall; then remembering his companion, impatiently waved her away. "Leave me now, leave me now, young sir!" he murmured.

Feeling discomfited, Luned gazed at him in doubt, and then went slowly down the stair, and sought comfort from Malen again.

"Are we very, very far from Rhôs?" she asked her.

"You will soon see," said Malen, "if you go past Morgan Ola's grave to the rocks beyond. You will see the house of Abereli then, plain as you see oak-trees from Rhôs."

"How far may Abereli be from Rhôs then?"

Malen chuckled. "Many a time have I walked the road between; 'tis a three-days' foot-faring, yes, sure, and a long day's ride, or more!"

"Then I can walk it in three days." Her heart leapt at the mere idea of it; and she set out to explore the only possible way home, going in such haste that she did not hear Malen's call to her of some further information.

Before the sea-house, with a tide half in, a range of black rocks was visible now in the haven where

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the boat had landed them last night. To the left the rocks receded sharply, and skirting them, the only visible track led off under the walls of the house, and so behind it. She supposed the house to stand on a spit of land, and she set off impulsively along the track. Once past the sea-house, she found that a sandy knoll beyond the unfinished grave shut out the view. She was superstitious about the grave, and half averted her eyes as she went by there. On reaching the knoll, she discovered that what had looked like a detached mound at a short distance now proved to be the sandy end of a brief ridge of higher ground. Hastening on, she scrambled up it, to emerge breathless in the long wiry grass and turfs of sea-wort on the top. She stood there, panting, one hand on her side, while her eyes roved hurriedly all around her. Then she sank down aghast.

On all sides, and at no great range, stretched in the morning sun, still unclouded, the blue, white-crested sea, which formed a channel some two or three miles between the mainland and Dinas Moryn. It had never entered her thoughts till now that Dinas Moryn could be, what it was, an island; indeed, hardly more than a reef of rock in the sea.

She had no heart to explore farther. For some time she remained sitting there confronting her predicament; then she returned dispiritedly to the sea-house. Stealing in unobserved and upstairs,

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she found her way into a small chamber whose door stood open. It was the third of three small rooms at the very top of the tower. There she threw herself on the pallet of a narrow bed, and gave herself up to despair.

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CHAPTER XVIII

LUNED APPEALS

BEFORE Luned had sobbed tears enough to make the pillow at her head any damper than it was already from the effect of the sea-airs and flying salt spray that saturate continually the walls of Dinas Moryn, she had fallen asleep. She dreamt she was at Rhôs, where she had wandered out into the wood below the house looking for Gringolet. And now, again, she saw his bright eyes looking at her through the leaves, and she called, and he came to her, the sun shining on the glossy curl of his neck. But when she put her hand on his mane, it was to find it cold—how unlike its usual silken warmth! And then she woke and saw it was not Gringolet at all, but the damp velvet coverlet of the bed, upon which her hand had been resting as she slept.

The unpleasantness of the sensation roused her, and she lay staring about her, wondering at the strange shapes surrounding her. The walls of the room were covered with crude frescoes of trees

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painted with straight brown trunks and long green branches. This, then, was Morgan Ola's chamber. It led her on to a waking dream of the man who had attempted a forest illusion in these bleak sea surroundings, and who was now laid in his grave amid the sand-dunes, with no green branch even to wave over him. How was it he was content to accept his fate and stay here? Ah, so would not she! She would fight, and suffer death, rather than live in such an exile.

She sat up in bed as she thought of it, and her eye fell upon a deep chest of oak in a corner of the room. She went over to it and tried the lid, which she had to lift off, and instantly it was as if a rich, living rosy light welled up and overflowed from it. She uttered a cry of laughter, like a little song, as she drew out a radiant silken robe of a soft flame-colour. It was embroidered with a fine silken netting of silver thread. She held it up and laughed again, and kissed its folds, in the sheer pleasure of beholding it and touching its delicate texture. Finally she decided to try it on. She was absorbed in the process, admiring the folds as they fell about her, when there was a creak at the door, and ere she could look for a hiding-place, in came Malen.

Malen could not restrain her wonder and delight. "In such a gown as that," she said, "ye can make the ould doctor do what ye will. That gown is the boat shall float you over to Abereli, and carry ye

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home, and cure your dad. You have tried Doctor Iago as a lad, now try him as a maid."

"He hates all maids."

"How do you know that?"

"My uncle said——"

"Your uncle! Ach! you do not believe Howel Farf! But hark ye, there is the old man calling me. What does he want?"

There came, in fact, a loud summons from the physician's door. Luned was not sorry to be left alone so as to look at herself and realise her own possible effect upon Iago. Would it be as Malen said? Malen went, and she heard him despatch her on some errand below. "Leave it at the door," he called after her in a voice tremulous and urgent.

In a few moments she heard Malen returning. The old woman had climbed the stairs so fast that she was out of breath, and, coming to Luned's chamber, begged her to take it to his door, and knock, and leave it there.

It was a long glass phial that Malen had taken down to wash for him. "He is in a huntsman's hurry for it," she said.

Drawing her crimson skirts around her, with a delightful sensation of recovered maidenliness and womanly new possibilities, she ascended the stairs as quickly as she could, and stole to Iago's closed door. Though it was closed, an aromatic fragrance as of some vaporous distillation reached her. She

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knocked without response, put down the phial, went away, and then, finding the phial had not been taken, was impelled to return again to listen. All was quiet within. The narrow passage without the door was very dark at all times, having no window to light it. Waiting there in some uneasiness, she knocked again. There was no reply for some minutes. She summoned up all her courage, and knocked a third time, more loudly. And then Iago's voice sounded, and she thought he said, "Bring it hither."

She lifted the latch. The chamber, which had a mere slit of a window, and that heavily draped from the day, was dark. A small silver lamp, with a green flame, gave the only light. The lamp burned beneath a crucible, whose curved beak was bent over a tiny crystal vase, with a narrow neck, into which was being distilled, drop by drop, a pale green viscous fluid. The star-master knelt, his head bent sideways to watch the process, in which he seemed wholly absorbed.

Occasionally he uttered a word. What was he saying? He was counting the drops in Latin.

"Seven! (*septem*) eight! (*octo*) nine! (*novem*)!" He clasped his hands. "Nine, ah, kind stars! Nine drops!" He removed the crucible. The little green flame spired high into the air, like some wondrous green plant—a stalk and a sole curved leaf, and within the fold of the leaf a suggested pale blossom.

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He rose to his feet, lifted, with a long hand and with infinite care, the tiny crystal vase, and was about to hold it up against the light, when Luned's gown, as she shifted her posture, rustled.

He turned his head, and seeing her uttered a cry and let the vase fall. It was shattered into a thousand pieces. At the same moment the flame of the lamp sank down and lightly expired, and the room was in darkness.

Luned, filled with a terror of untold, unknown things, turned, trembling and shaken, and fled from the room.

* * * * * *

After this catastrophe Luned hurriedly disrobed herself of the crimson gown, and put it away. She grew afraid of meeting Iago. Two days passed, during which sky and sea were seized with a wintry fit, and she lost all hope of escape. Grey rain-storms swept rampant over the island, and her only distractions were talking to Malen and going up to the top of the tower (in much fear lest Iago should see her). The one topmost light of the tower, as she had discovered, afforded just a glimpse of the opposite mainland; but this was now blotted out by the grey sheets of rain that intervened. At every other hour, she mounted there to see if this curtain was lifted.

Here, crouched upon the damp stone ledge within,

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she would sit, and pipe now and again "Merch Megan," or those more plaintive notes of Euryn's.

As she whistled, the sea-surges thundering around made a tremendous bass to that thin treble. They sounded indeed to her as if they were undermining the very foundations of the sea-house, whose walls trembled sensibly at every successive roll of the waves. These hollow noises by degrees came to associate themselves with the place, as if they were its natural voice. To her they were only melancholy, of a part with Morgan Ola's grave, which she could see below, beaten by the rain. The sense of her own disappointment, imprisoned here like Morgan, gave her a very intimate feeling for the dead man in the clay, his grave unprotected from the salt blasts. She could not bring it home to her thought that he who lay there, uncomforted by death, was a denizen of that water-whelmed city of which Malen had told. No; like her, he was a lover of the green woods and the mountain streams; and he fretted in his grave, as he had done in this tower, for the want of them.

She almost began to imagine him alive still and moving about in the chambers of the sea-house. The deep shadows of the chambers, and the noises of the storm, during these dark hours, lent themselves to the illusion. One night, she dreamt he came and stood by her bed, and gazed at her long and wistfully, as if he would ask her a question; and then a turn

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of his head reminded her of some one she had known. Who it was she could not settle in her mind. A day or two before, feeling in the pocket of the grey tunic, she had found imbedded in the lining a dry birch-catkin. She had put it there formerly when she sat with Perrot by the grave-yard-wall. She decided now to go at the first opportunity to the grave and scatter the birch-seed upon it.

But still another wilder day of storm followed, when this errand of pity was impossible. The sea-house veritably trembled to its foundations, and she grew afraid to remain at the tower-top. Chilled by the salt blast that swept in at the eyelet, frightened by the sea-noises, she was driven early to take refuge below.

There the door stood wide open, and gusts of spray and rain swept in, and blew about the smoke of the poor fire that smouldered on the hearth. Going to the door, she caught a glimpse of Malen emerging—for so it appeared—from the ground. Some old ship's planks, covering an opening like a well, were set aside, and on a sign from Malen she ran through the rain, to find that they had hidden the entrance to a narrow chasm with rough steps descending into it. From its mouth came a kind of subterranean thunder, the sound of a furious washing of water—the origin of that uneasy rumbling noise she had noticed from within the tower.

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Malen, bidding her follow, led the way down the steps. As they crept down them, the light from above faded, and another light welled up from below, and lighted the way to a shelf of rock confronting an immense sinuous cavern. This subterranean chamber must undermine half the island, for its opening was hidden by a noble row of natural pillars, and the daylight was grown sombre in penetrating its deep recesses. But the sea roamed in green smooth billows, freely and uninterruptedly, and only ended by breaking in foam upon a ridge of rock not a stone's throw from their feet. At their feet was a still, profound pool of water, which the waves did not disturb.

"Hush, hush now!" said Malen at length, as if she spoke to some unquiet beast, "and let me speak! There's no such cellar in all the sea as this," she added in Luned's ear, "and the cellar has no bottom. The stair goes on down into this black pool that the waves never break into. Anything that goes down never comes up. That is the way to the city I told you of. The dead master has found his way there by this. Look ye, how the salt-wash is biting bits out of the stone under the old sea-house. It has taken many a mouthful out of it since I saw it first; a few winters, a few storms, and the old island and the old house with it, will be tumbling in: *ïë wir!* But come, or the seed of the fire will be gone from the hearth;" and Malen led the way back,

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replacing the planks over the cavern's mouth as she went.

* * * * *

Next morning broke fine. The air was clear, the sea robed in swaying silk, blue and green and purple. The mainland across the strait was like a new-created other earth. Luned could plainly see green trees with curly branches in one sea-glen; they seemed to be marching, a joyous company, down to the sea. This glimpse she caught early from the eyelet at top of the tower; and the trees made her think of the birch-catkin in her pocket, and of Morgan Ola's grave. Now, now, let her hasten out, and meet the day, and plant the birch-seed.

Beside the grave she stood and gazed on the clay. She imagined the face of the dead man looking up in the grey mask of death; it had grown almost familiar, although she had never seen it alive. And then she looked across at the curved coast, north and south—and again, at the sight of it shining clear, she was seized by strong hope, and Rhôs, and all that was Rhôs, rushed upon her mind.

She pictured herself riding up to the gate, whistling the stave of "Mentra Gwen" to announce her return to the house. At the thought of it, she put the whistle to her lips, and whistled it loud and clear. Thereupon an approaching step made her turn. It was Iago. She felt uneasy, and would gladly have

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avoided him, had there been any escape. She hid her pipe in her tunic. As he approached, his pale eyes twinkled with unusual friendliness, and his voice, she noticed, was unusually buoyant. "What strange sea-bird," he said, "is it that pipes on Dinas Moryn? Did you come to watch for it?"

She drew out the birch-catkin. "I was going to plant the seed of a birch. But perhaps it will never grow in this barren place."

"It ought to have been sown ere winter," he said, "and the birch does not love the salt; but what matter? Morgan Ola' has all the stars under his feet now," he added, "that lived and died here fast bound to this island."

"I think he would like to have lain under a tree," she said. "He has painted trees on the walls within that are like the old crabbéd trees in a part of the oak woods above Rhôs. Oh, sire, like him, I cannot live here; I long for trees—birches and great oaks; and I am sad for Rhôs, and the reedy meadows, and the woods at Rhôs."

"If you will come to my chamber," he said, nervously plucking at the pins stuck in his gown, "perhaps I can give you some comfort." With that, Iago turned and went back to the sea-house.

What did he mean? Presently, when the birch-seed was duly put in the sandy clay, Luned turned toward the house, and there ascended the stair to his chamber. When she entered, he showed a little

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repast of oat cakes with a cup of milk spread on a table.

"First," he said, "you shall eat and drink, for I have much to show you." He went to a chest thereupon, and took from it a square book, leather-bound and clamped with brass.

"This," he said, with a voice trembling with pride, "this is my starry book, my '*Seren Iechyd*,' into which no eyes but mine have ever looked. But, Master Perrot, the stars have not set us, their creatures—youth and age—side by side on this lonely rock to no purpose. It were poor wisdom that did not seek mirrors and take disciples. In this book there are secrets of immortality, and recipes for making men invisible and women supernaturally radiant, like to angelic beings. If this were lost, bethink ye what loss that were to the world. A fair copy such as the scribes of Llantwit make, a delicate, fair copy—that, young sir, were a labour worthy and famous to break the tedium of thy sea hours, if we can but procure a few clean skins of parchment by way of Abereli. Until these may be had, it were well to practise young memory, my son, upon those pages which tell of the consciousness of herbs, and the kindness the stars show unto them."

With this adjuration Iago dismissed his pupil, who had expected very different consolation, bidding her carry the precious book to the upper chamber of the tower.

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But when she had read the first page, which contained Greek words and Hebrew signs, besides extraordinary philosophical terms of Iago's own coining, she found it (as her thoughts were indeed far elsewhere) utterly beyond her comprehension. So presently, tired of trying to decipher it, she stole out, leaving the book of mysteries behind her, and made her way down to the sea.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE LITTLE WORLD

IAGO must have gone at length to seek his pupil, and found his book lying neglected. When she returned, and crept upstairs again, it was gone. A day or two passed then, during which Iago made no further proffer of his starry philosophy. But one morning she heard a sturdy step outside the sea-house, and going out, met a fisherman in a rough blue sea-smock at the door. He carried a heavy basket, and asked for Iago.

"Tell him Peter is come—cockle-picker Peter!" he announced.

Her first thought was, as she led him in and called Malen, to find where he had moored his boat, and appeal to him on his return to it to take her back with him. He had come up the steps from the cavern. While he was in the house she quickly made her way down to the platform at its inner end, and beheld there, with a hundred tremors of hope and fear, a coracle. There it lay, the possible bridge to Rhôs, pulled up on a shelf of rock, and

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turned indifferently on its back. It was so light as she examined it—a blunt oval of tarred canvas and wicker-work—that she could easily have turned it over. But it would have been impossible for her to manage it, even if she could have got it into the water. She must wait.

It seemed an age before Peter came, although there was only an hour's margin during which the tide served for his return journey. He had left his basket behind, and carried two letters. He started at seeing the figure of a boy by the coracle. When this boy, with tears in his eyes, begged Peter to carry him ashore to Abereli, Peter laughed good-naturedly.

"Sure enough I'll take ye, if there's room for your legs to spraddle," he said.

With that, he lifted the coracle lightly into the water, and then stepped into it. When he sat down in the unsteady craft, there was no place, as he said, "for anything more than a puddle of salt water. So, good-day to you, little master," he cried; "I'll be back at Dinas in a se'nnight, and bring a fishing-line to give ye sport with the codlings."

But Luned sat down on the rock, and buried her face in her hands.

This was but one of many disappointments. Peter came back, and back again. He brought fishing-lines, parchment skins, letters for Iago. She begged him invariably to help her, and he agreed

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to everything she proposed. But he did nothing. His coming and going measured the weeks, as the tides did the days; that was all. Once in a while a distant sail passed, or fishing boats put out from Abereli; but no other craft than Peter's came near Dinas Moryn. Still, she kept constant watch, and spent hours sitting in a ledge of rock, where at full tide the sea poured into a rift which had some secret communication with the cavern. There would she fall to whistling a plaintive tune, or to weeping in sheer pity for herself, and wondering always in her rage and sorrow what the days were bringing to Rhôs. There was little gleam of hope in this; yet it was only the hope of escape to-morrow—always to-morrow—that kept her from black despair.

One thing that cheered her a little was that after many days a tiny sprout of birch appeared on Morgan Ola's grave. She tended it, sighed her troubles over it, and promised to return to Dinas, whatever happened, that she might see how it was grown. Meanwhile Iago, having procured parchment by Peter's aid, set his pupil at length to copying the Book of Stars and Herbs. This she did not accomplish with much patience, unless her copy (by which alone any evidence of Iago's great work remains) is a false witness.

* * * * *

The birch had grown into a sapling as high as her knees, and higher; the book had almost reached its

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hundredth page; and Luned had settled into a grey habit of mind and a monotonous endurance of her lot, that hardly noted the merging of week into week, month into month, when, early one morning, Malen came to tell her as she sat down to her writing that a vessel was passing. She hurried out to her rocky outpost. The sun was rising behind her; the vessel, before far on the horizon, was tinged with its rays for a moment, then disappeared. She turned back to the sea-house disconsolate, and at the top of the stair was confronted by Iago.

"Come," he said eagerly, "leave your writing!" And he led her into his room, and with trembling hands took from a chest a polished, gleaming, silver ewer. "Here," said Iago, "is a bowl that, filled with well-water, shall show you things that are passing far from here, whether it be at Rome itself or among the reeds of Rhôs. And here," said he again, "is a phial which contains three drops of a crystal fluid, each of which is the fee of a life. When I have made the three thirty—for there are but two moons in the year when the essence may be distilled, and the phial fell long ago as I was filling it, so that but three were left—you shall have a grace of it to minister to your smitten father, when we shall come to him, or he to Dinas."

Iago replaced now the precious phial, and turning again to the bowl swathed it in the folds of a black cloth. Then he filled it from a pitcher brimful of

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clear water, setting it on a low table so that she could kneel and look into it without discomfort. This done, he lit the bronze lamp she had seen before, and carefully adjusted at the window-niche a heavy black curtain, so that no other light could enter.

"I have seen so starry a creature once in this chamber, in a flame-hued garment," said he, "that I know this chamber to be a place of subtlety and continual vision. And if it be, as I believe, that vast commotion is shaking all the secular world, that its kings are falling, and its men who were high lie low, well for you, Perrot, that you are here, and not wandering the wasted lands of Rhôs. But now kneel and look long and earnestly, and tell me what you discern within the well-water."

She knelt then as he directed her, placing two hands about the bowl. At first her thoughts wandered, and she was tempted to look up and to question Iago's face; but his compressed lips and painful glance warned her to desist; and soon it was Rhôs and its people, Lowry and Rhosser, maids and men, that began to fill all the interior of her mind.

"Tell me," said he, after a while, "tell me truly what you see in the little world!"

"I see," said she abstractedly, as she gazed into the crystal, "the hall at Rhôs. The maids move to and fro silently. The hall is almost dark. A woman is leaning at the hearth. She is watching,

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a pot on the embers. Now a flame spurts up, and she turns her face. It is my mother. She is tired. Her chin rests on her hand. Her face is very white ——" Here a sob threatened to interrupt her further account of what she saw.

"Nay, go on," said Iago sternly. "One tear in the water will spoil all."

"Now," said Luned, "now the hall is grown dim, as if a smoke were blown out from the fire. My mother turns, as 'twere, to hear a sound at the door as of some one knocking, knocking. She rises and goes to the door. The door partly opens. A shadow, like a swirl of thick smoke, is there. No; it is a woman in black robes. She tries to enter. My mother strives with her, and would push her away. She strives harder, but in vain. She is driven away, and the door is shut again."

"Have you seen the woman before?"

"Oh no; she is a foreign woman. Her robes are not such as we wear; but I could not see her face——"

"Go on," said Iago.

"I see the gate before a castle. Its walls are cracking. Three horsemen in mail break out of the gate. The foremost two I do not know; they wear Norman helms. The third is Howel Farf. A meadow lies below, and a sunlit stream, level with the grass, is brightly coursing through it. A multitude of men and horse are surging there to and fro.

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But now another multitude, still greater, seems to arise and come against them. They meet with a whirling of swords and spears. Ha! now—now the river runs red with blood, and the place fades from me in a blurred shadow. I am afraid."

"Go on, go on!" cried Iago eagerly.

"I can no more," she sobbed. "I am afraid to look at what comes. One face fills the crystal, and it has a laughing mouth and blanched cheeks and a black beard, and it has that which tells me of death in it——"

"But wait," said Iago, coming to her and with some show of irritation and disappointment taking away the strip of parchment. "You have not seen what you ought to see. Wait now awhile."

"Oh no! for I am held fast. It is as if some hand holds fast my head and bends it down to the mirror of the water. I see a narrow chamber, and there, upon a narrow pallet, lies a sick man. Oh, I am sad," she said, "sad and heart-broken to see him. His head is swathed in black bandages, his face is wasted and grey with pain, his strong hand lies weak on the green coverlet, like a dead leaf on the grass." Here she suddenly broke off her story, and lifting her eyes from the water, looked distractedly about the room, crying out, "Father—Rhosser!—it is my father. I heard him call me. Oh, sire," she went on, rising, "I must go from here—go—go at once to Rhôs."

Iago started went to the window, and impatiently

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drew aside its curtain, as if he would put an end to these visions.

But Luned's eye, meanwhile, glanced once again on the water in the bowl, and with that last look she rose, and without another word suddenly left the chamber.

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CHAPTER XX

THE CORACLE

LUNED'S last glance into the bowl had shown her what appeared to be a pale reflection of the creek before the sea-house, with a coracle rounding the leeward horn and dropping a brown sail no bigger than a cloak. Going now to the nearest window looking seaward, she scanned, with a fever in her eyes, the creek below. Wondrous silver bowl! the boat was there. Quickly she reckoned up her small chances of escape; for the coracle, if larger than Peter's usual craft, was yet barely large enough for the man and boy it carried. The man alone was active, lowering the sail and then paddling in the coracle to the beach below them. The boy sat still, his head down, as if afraid of moving or disturbing the boat's balance. Luned freighted with all her cares and fears that frail shell of delicate canvas, stretched on its wicker frame, as it floated in, lightly as a feather. When it had nearly reached the shore, her excitement was too much for her. She made her way down to the door, in time to see the coracle

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touch the bank of brown sea-weed below the rocks. The man, whom she recognised then for Peter, stepped out, and the boy handed him a small packet. With this in his hand he made his way up to the house. The tide was at the turn, and the boy remained by the coracle, which showed they intended no long stay. But as he stood there, something in his bearing startled Luned's curiosity.

"What boy is that?" she asked Peter, and gave him no time to answer.

"A letter, dying to be read," she overheard him say to Malen as they went into the house, and she ran on to the beach. The boy still stood with his back to the house, busily disrobing himself of the clumsy garb he wore—a borrowed man's smock and a sea-cap with flaps, both much too big for him, which had given him a dwarfish aspect as she drew near. But he whipped them off now, when she had come within a couple of paces of him, and turning his head slightly, disclosed the face and sly look askance of Perrot.

Perrot, in truth; none other. He put a finger to his lips as she was about to put twenty questions to him, and caught her hand in his.

"Sweet Maid of Rhôs, your father is very sick, and you must come at once. I bribed Peter to bring me over; it was the only boat, and it will only hold two. What shall we do? Where is the old fellow?" He meant Iago.

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Luned pointed to the house. She must appeal to Iago.

"What if he won't let you go?" cried Perrot, as she turned to go to him.

But she was already flying up the steep bank before the door. When she found Iago, Peter was with him upstairs, and he was at a window, reading the despatch Peter had brought. The letter was brief, but to the purpose. It was from the little cleric, Father Alcwyn, begging that the Maid of Rhôs should be permitted to return because her father had come back sick from foreign parts, and was like to die of a fever.

"Where did you have this?" he asked Peter.

"A little squire, he might be the King of England's son, so sweet-mouthed is he. And he wears a dagger fit to open cockles or prick a buck's throat—either one or the other. And he rode a mountain pony so fast till it burst its skin atop of Abereli bank. And little master——" It was evident Peter would extend his account of Perrot by all manner of flourishes in this vein, if he were permitted.

Iago cut him short. "Where is this messenger?"

Peter pointed to the beach.

"Well, he shall carry a letter back to Rhôs," Iago remarked to Luned, "to say you will leave here in two days."

"But oh, she cried, "it is Perrot—Perrot himself is the messenger—I have spoken to him, and my father,

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he says, lies a-dying. Kind sire, I must go now—go at once."

Iago was shaken by such pitiful urgency. "How many will your coracle carry?" he asked Peter.

"Indeed, your holy worship, 'tis only fit for one. With two in it, it is like a cracked pot in a pail of water."

"There," said Iago, "what can we do? How came the boy to Abereli—he had only one pony?"

"And that one hath broke his wind."

"But horses are to be had at Abereli?"

"Never a one, save Sioni's mare, and she is a score and a half of winters old. But," he added, "money will breed a couple, I reckon, by the day after to-morrow, or the mid of the week, if you need them!"

It seemed everything was against her reaching Rhôs.

What could she do? While she was hesitating, Iago, turning to her, spoke of the letter Morgan Ola had left; that, at any rate, ought to be despatched. It was in a drawer of his table where he had shown her the phial, in the room he had used as his laboratory; and he begged her to get it while he indited the reply to the letter which Peter had brought. Hastening to the upper chamber, she opened a drawer at a venture; it was that containing Iago's phial; and at the sight of it a sudden impulse prompted her to take it. She did so,

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secreting it within an inner pocket of her tunic; it might save the sick man yet.

She turned to the other drawer, and found Morgan Ola's letter, a long, sealed packet of stained parchment, tied about by a yellow thread. To her surprise, she found it bore the superscription, "To my little son, Jestyn."

When she rejoined Iago, he was writing painfully his epistle to the little cleric. He did not like to be interrupted. "Yes, yes!" he said impatiently; "Peter shall bring it after you to the boat, if you go on with the other," he cried: "the tide is at the turn and Peter says he cannot wait."

She flew down the stair. Peter was hurriedly drinking there a cup of wine. There was no time to lose. She led Malen out to the rocky platform before the door, and told her how things had fallen out.

Malen fell a-muttering, and glanced suspiciously back at Peter. "Go you to the coracle," she said; "there are more doctors than Iago, and more boatmen than Peter." What did she mean?

Together they ran to the coracle.

"She shall go back instead of me," said Perrot to Malen, when he heard.

"No!" interposed Malen: "you must go to show her the way. Cannot you paddle, young master? Can't you manage a coracle?" But Perrot uttered a desperate No! and with that Malen eased the

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coracle from the bed of seaweed, which marked the high-water mark, and motioned Luned to step into it. She bundled Perrot in. "And now," she said, walking into the water, pushing it off, and then getting in lightly herself, "the three of us are not so heavy as Peter. The current outside and the wind will do the rest. There won't be such another fair breeze again these twenty days."

Before Luned had quite realised it, they were being carried out to the openings of the little creek before the house. The coracle spun like a top. Every swirl of the current made it dance again; and the one-bladed paddle in Malen's hand seemed a thing bewitched. They were in difficulties among the rocks outside notwithstanding, when by good hap, Malen having sported the small sail, the wind, though it was as gentle as breathing, swept them clear. The last glimpse they had of the island at close quarters was of Peter, running red and explosive, along the sandy bank of the western horn of the creek, and calling out to them to put about. But in vain he twisted his mouth and made his brown hand into a speaking trumpet. They could not have put about if they would.

Meanwhile, the wind drove the coracle at a scudding pace against the eastern shore of the headland beyond Abereli. They ran far before they dropped sail, and the paddle did not save them from a sand-bank, where they ran aground. There

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they struggled vainly, and had finally to jump out into shallow water, and wade ashore, dragging the coracle after them. There they safely beached and left it, Malen turning it upside down, as the custom was with these craft.

She hurried them over the rocks and made light of the roughness of the way. But when they had crossed a last sea-gully and stepped upon the yellow half moon of sand at the other end of which stood the white houses of Abereli, she said exultantly: "Faith, Rhosser is saved, if we can get nags to ride!"

At a mean mud-walled hostelry, standing on the edge of the sands, Perrot had left his over-ridden pony. This house had a primitive sign-post made of an old ship's mast stuck out from the gable. As they approached, Luned saw it was adorned with the last tattered twigs of a wine-bush, and a weather-beaten sheaf of barley-straw, which were tied to the ship's mast.

Drawing nearer, Perrot snapped his fingers as he pointed out four or five great horses, carelessly tethered so that they were kicking and biting each other, under the landward gable of the house. From within came a sound of roystering, which gradually resolved itself into this profane stanza:

> Down went Ned, poor King Ned!
> And up came Mortimer instead.
> "And where will I go then?" said King Ned.
> "Where will you go? I don't know!"

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Said Queen Bel;
"Who can tell?"
"You go a-begging!" Mortimer said.
Chorus. So down goes Ned, old King Ned:
And up comes Mortimer instead.

"Soldiers," said Malen. "Were they here when you left with Peter, young master?"

Perrot shook his head, and Malen pointed the way to a neighbouring hut. "Peter's house," she added. "These men mustn't see us!" She darted off like a hare through the soft sand, and they both turned to follow her, when by bad luck there was an increased commotion among the horses under the hostelry. This brought a couple of men to the door, one of whom was still carolling lustily:

"Down goes Ned, poor King Ned,"

a stave which stopped when he saw them.

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CHAPTER XXI

A PIPING SCENE

"HERE, youngsters! Here, young squires!" the singing man-at-arms called out. He took Malen probably for some native old body of the place.

"Take no notice," said Perrot, hurrying on: "the beast is full of wine!"

But the man was not to be gainsaid. He called out again, threatening to send a bolt after them if they did not halt.

"There are more inside. Come," said Perrot to Luned, stopping short; "we will gammon him with a silver bit or so."

"'Down goes Ned,'" sang the man again, separating the tangled reins of the horses as they approached: "'Down goes Ned, Up comes Mortimer instead.' Who are you for? Queen Isabel or old King Nedward? Come inside, and drink the health of my lord and master, Mortimer, and sing us a song! You can sing now, I can tell that," he said, turning more particularly to Luned: "you have as singing a mouth as ever I set eyes on."

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Luned, in terror of the man, shook her head.

"What—not sing? what then?"

"He can pipe as like a bird," said Perrot, coming to the rescue—"as like an ousel on a May morning, as your nose is like the king's trumpeter, all dressed in red!"

"My nose!—ha, ha," laughed the man. "Come in, young gentlemen; for I see you are no common pups of this village. You shall drink the health of Queen Belle—in good wine, not beer—and whistle and sing; ay, you shall that."

The turbulence of the scene, the brutal noises and effects of wine within, so frightened Luned, that she turned white as milk. But Perrot, seeing his chance, made a valiant grimace at her, and nodded assurances to put her in better countenance. She made an effort, then, to recover her nerve; and she drank a draught out of the huge pewter cup when it was put into her hands. She even tried to copy Perrot in assuming a roysterer's airs, which he did with an absurd, little boy's mixture of delighted impudence, panic, naughtiness, and innocence.

From his face, still disguised by the sea-cap, Luned's glance swept round the place,—the low rafters, smoked and cobwebbed; the hearth, huge and black as a smith's forge, distilling smoke; the burly men in steel and leather sitting at the crazy table with the air of being heavily under the spell of the familiar imp of the ale-pot.

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"Here's one can blow a whistle like a flute for sweetness," said their first acquaintance. "Make way for a young gentleman. He shall stand on the table—Holy Blue, so he shall—and we'll shut our eyes, and fancy we're listening to the brown bird of St. Ouen!"

On the table were a leather bottle, a pewter platter of broken meat, another of bread, and (when it was not circulating) the pewter mug, that surely held half a gallon.

"Look out," cried one of the men; and with that cleared the board by the simple method of lifting one end of it, so that the dishes and cups, and their contents, slid rattling to the sandy floor. "Now!" he cried to Luned, "up with you, my blackbird."

There was nothing for it save to mount as she was bid. But when she had mounted there, something of unusual youthful grace in her presence struck even these roysterers; and when she began to whistle, and the soft piping began, like a thrush in his most rapturous notes, the place grew silent as a birch-grove on a May morning. The goodman stole to the inner door; the goodwife peeped round his arm. Not one of the five, well fumed with wine as they were, so much as stirred a hand. The close den might have been a green thicket. It seemed its oak rafters remembered their woodland days, and put forth buds and branches, sprayed with green, that stirred to the melody of it.

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When she had finished, she would have jumped down, but Perrot made a sign to her to go on from the door where he stood, and conveyed by a hardly perceptible nod that he wished to slip out. What sudden whim was in his head?

She fell back then upon the simple, plaintive melody of "Llwyn On" (the Ash Grove), and whistled it so tenderly that the men's eyes shut in a sentimental ecstasy.

But the piping was now untimely ended by a noise of shouts, barking curs, and stamping horses without. The men, with a volley of curses at the interruption, got up and ran to the door. There was matter for fresh imprecations to be found there. However it had come about, three of the five horses were loose from their tether, and galloping wildly across the sands, chased by a couple of yarking curs. The other two had disappeared.

Luned did not divine that the author of this mischief was Malen, until she was seized by Perrot in the doorway, and dragged out through the back of the hostelry to the stable.

The place was a foul shed, full of brown shadows and browner malodours. A rough Welsh pony was lying panting on the ground. But Perrot dragged her on to a sandy yard, and half laughing, half choking with his tremors, showed her where Malen stood holding the other two horses. Malen helped her to mount one, and Perrot clambered on to the other.

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"Go!" cried the old woman: "I may be at Rhôs before either of ye."

Behind the house clustered a string of dirty hovels about the banks of a small stream, which made a hollow. In a moment, Perrot had urged his horse through the water, and finding a rough dyke and a grassy common on the left, took to the turf. There, making the most of what thorns, furze bushes and other covert they could find, they struck away boldly at a hand-gallop.

They rode furiously the first mile, hardly daring to speak, and afraid of every shout behind them. No pursuit declared itself, however, and when they had passed a ruined tower, and found another small dingle and stream, they took courage and paused to recover themselves and reconnoitre.

"Oh, you and Malen did that very well!" said Luned, with all the girl's admiration of a boy's escapade.

"We have got their two best horses," said Perrot, "and a good start; but we must lose no time in beating about."

"Besides," she added, "we might meet others. What were they doing at Abereli?"

"Mischief, black mischief. You don't know what things have come about since that night you left Rhôs. Howel Farf put it about that you had been spirited away, to Lannion or Morlaix; and Rhosser went across there to seek you. He is ill, since he

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came back; and the country is ill. The King is down. The De Spencers are down, and your uncle—— But hark!" A horn was blown, away on their right towards the sea-shore, as he spoke.

"Come!" cried Perrot; "we must take the hill." And he dug his heels into the flanks of his huge horse.

At the top of the hill stood a small round tower, white-washed, and so posted against the sky-line as to catch the sun.

Perrot was suspicious of this tower. Some one on the look-out, he muttered, must be in it; but there was no turning back. "The Perrots are powerful in this commot," he said; "indeed, in all this country. We had better say we come from Arberth, and bear despatches to Rhôs and Castle Caerdyth."

Agreed in this, they urged on their horses to the tower. All that they found there were two herds and a sheep-cur. The younger of the two (both were unkempt and only half-clad), instead of a stick or crutch, held a spear, a most beautiful weapon of embossed steel, in his hand.

"Ha!" cried Perrot in Welsh, as they rode up, assuming an air of pert authority, "where got you that pretty thing?"

For reply, the young herdsman, who was tall and sinewy, raised it, and hurled it with great force at Perrot's head. He ducked, seeing it coming, and it missed him; but it grazed Luned's horse on the hind-quarters, raising the hair, and so frightening

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the beast that it started and set off at a wild gallop. Perrot very wisely attempted no revenge, but rode after her. In this way they thundered down upon a small grange and mill, situate at a wood-side, with water dammed into a murky mill-pond from a scanty stream. Into this pond Luned's horse, though a little slackened in its gallop, would have carried her, but at the capping moment a girl, whose hair and gown were dusted with meal, ran out of the mill-house and very deftly caught the beast by the bridle. This accomplished, she drew back, as if shame-faced at her own courage, within the doorway. Luned was still too frightened to accost the girl, but Perrot asked her which was the best way to Arberth.

"My father's within," said the maid, looking at them with mixed curiosity and uneasiness; "I'll ask him."

"No, don't," cried Perrot, and beckoned to her to come out to them.

She came out unwillingly. "They're fighting over there," she said; she pointed to the north-east. "And there lies the road to Arberth."

"Who are fighting?" asked Perrot.

"Some of Mortimer's men; they were hunting him they call Howel Farf these days past; but he—— Don't you young squires belong to one of them?"

Perrot shook his head. "We bear despatches for Sir John Perrot," he said.

"I should be afraid," she said simply: "they are

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burning the country up yonder as they go—corn stacks and coverts and granges. But they tell that Owain Lawgoch is coming, and a thousand knights and men with him. Oh, I should be afraid. And he, Howel Farf, was coming here to fire the mill. They say he had a long black beard, and every hair he pulled from it strangled a maid. There was the Maid of Rhôs—she was kin to him. He carried her away. Oh, 'tis too awful to tell——"

Luned gazed open-mouthed, turning pale at the girl's account of her reputed awful overtaking at Howel's hands.

"What do they say?" asked Perrot of the girl.

"Oh, I can't tell you—everything!" she said with a gesture that hinted at some unspeakable stroke of death—or worse.

Another voice broke this strange colloquy. It was the miller in person, who appeared at the sack door in the second floor of the mill. His voice was husky with flour or fright.

"Hi!" he cried, "you'd better be on your way. I hear horses coming now—a score or more—the road you came by. Howel Farf himself, I shouldn't wonder. Better be off!"

They waited to hear no more; but in a trice were urging their great horses up the narrow dingle above the mill, acting on a wave of the girl's hand in that direction. Three black pigs were the only further adventure, till they emerged on a long reach

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of melancholy moorland, extending for miles without a tree.

"Can this be Carew moor?" said Luned.

"No! but you see that brown smoke in the north, and some castle to the right of it. There must be a barn burning. You had better keep away, he says."

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CHAPTER XXII

THE DEATH'S-HEAD

ON leaving the moor, Perrot piloted Luned over a swampy meadow, and came to a stream bordered by thick hazel copses. Beside a brown pool they reined up to let their horses drink.

Perrot, forgetting his fears in a trice, was delighted with the nuts, gleaming white on the branches of the nut-trees; delighted with the stream and the green spot in which the hazels grew; and delighted with the success of the whole adventure. He laughed as he described how he had ridden past the same nut-trees yesterday, and would not stay in his haste to reach Dinas.

"Never mind," he said; "they are riper to-day." And he dismounted, with an inimitable grimace of small boy's droll gratification, handing his rein to Luned to hold, and darting off to another riper copse. She followed with the horses.

There was a rustle in the leaves.

"What was it?" she asked, in a sudden terror.

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"Nothing but a squirrel. We are far from Howel Farf."

"Do not speak of him. I am afraid of the very sound of his name."

"Ah ha!" cried a bold voice close on their right: "you don't like to think of Howel Farf!"

They turned in terror.

An enormous head and shoulders protruded from a hazel brake close by Perrot. Luned recognised at once in the intruder, Cadno, Howel's lieutenant.

She could not refrain from a cry of Perrot!" who was nearest the point of danger. He, without a word, made a cat's scramble for his great horse's pad. It was of no use. Cadno had the arm of a gorilla. It shot out of the brake, and seized the reins of Perrot's horse, pulling it round so that he fell to the ground on one knee. But he did not lose his presence of mind, and called out, even in Cadno's clutches, to Luned to mount and ride off.

She did not hesitate, but luckily caught the beak of her horse's pad, and was up on the huge beast in a trice. A simultaneous yell from a dozen throats of the men Cadno held in ambush was so far good that it frightened her horse into a sudden plunge that all but unseated her. He went off, charging a hazel-tree at a lumbering canter, with a loose rein; while half a dozen bolts rattled in the leaves about her.

He carried her at length into a quiet pasture where

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three red cows, with their calves tethered near, were grazing as quietly as if there had never been such a thing as fear, or rumour of Redhands, to disturb its peace. Her horse was too tired, however, now, to maintain such a flight for long. Less than a mile farther of level fields brought them to a stiff bank, and he pulled up sulkily at its foot and fell into a slow, heavy, walking stride. She was consternated at the pause, fearing to be overtaken; but when she glanced back, there was no sign of pursuit. Her danger, if she had known it, lay not behind but before. At the head of the ascent stood a strongly posted grange, with high walls around. Screened by trees, it looked sleepy as she rode up; but she was deceived. Near the gateway, sat atop of the wall a long-legged man, his legs dangling to and fro. Well armed, cross-bow in hand, a Rheims' cap of leather and steel on his head, he had a gaily formidable air, which was very much that of the man in possession.

"Ha, monsieur!" he called out to her, "where are you for? Raglan or Dieppe? Hé?"

She tried to urge on her horse, but he stopped dead. Meanwhile the man playfully raised his cross-bow, and spoke to some one within the yard of the grange. Very quickly the gates opened; and two men-at-arms of a more serious air than that of the man on the wall stepped briskly out, seized her horse, and led him in. Half a score of other men

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were standing by horses in the yard. She saw at once they were Norman men-at-arms, and she felt equally certain that she was trapped.

She was taken before a casual tribunal of three in the hall of the grange—apparently a petty captain and two masters-of-arms. The petty captain had a heavy face and a dull, slow voice; but he was intelligent.

"You have a letter, monsieur; for whom?"

She was compelled to produce the letter from Morgan Ola' to her father. He examined it, and broke the seal; but as it was written in Welsh, he could make nothing of it.

"Humph," he said, handing it back to her, to her great relief, "looks like one of Howel of the Beard's tricks. My lord of Kemes shall receive it from your own hands. And now," he added, looking at her keenly, "you have something else there in your pouch. Come!"

In fact, she was so anxious about Iago's little phial containing the three precious drops, that her hand kept involuntarily travelling towards the pocket that held it.

"Come!" said the captain a second time, more urgently.

She had much ado to keep a brave face. A blush, she felt, would be fatal. She thought it wise to produce the phial, and explain it was medicine for a sick man, her father!

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The captain examined the phial.

"Three drops," he said. "There's some devil's trick in the bottle. People send poison, not physic, in three drops." He tried to uncork it, but the slender stopper evaded his big fingers. One of his comrades suggested his committing the bottle to the fire in the kitchen. But he shook his head; and thereupon, growing impatient, laid the phial on the edge of the oak table, and drawing his *couteau de croix*, with one blow cracked it.

Luned could not refrain from crying out, as if the blow hurt her physically. Fortunately, the captain, in questioning her further, asked her if she had passed any *gamins gallois* on the way. This brought out the fact of her having fled before Howel Farf's men who were in ambush, and who had detained her companion.

"And who was your companion?" asked the captain.

"Perrot," she said, to the astonishment of the three men; for they were themselves nominally under the command of Sir James Perrot.

The end and upshot of it was she must go with them to Arberth, so soon as another small detachment they were waiting for should arrive. It was clear that they held Howel Farf in too much respect to risk lightly a collision with him.

"But wait till my lord of Kemes comes!" said the captain, as he rose to see to the lodging of his

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prisoner in a parlour of the grange, under surveillance: "he will find Monsieur Barbe-noir a French barber."

The *ennui* of delay, the thought of the broken phial and of Perrot's ill-luck, and the gloom of the dark, mouldy parlour in which she was placed, were together rapidly threatening to make Luned's mood a hopeless one, when she heard a hubbub without, due to the coming of the expected detachment. Small ale, with barley bread and mouldy cheese, was doled out to the whole party; and she was wise enough to control her feelings and eat.

The party rode off in double file, save where she was placed, in its midst, between two guards. They travelled for a few miles at no great pace, as the sun sank over the May meadows, and a cold keen wind sprang up in the north-east. How far, she thought, how hopelessly far she was still from Rhôs, where she had hoped to arrive that night. With the cold wind, a smear of grey mist was drawn over the evening sky, and the night fell rapidly. A league of narrow bridle-paths and by-roads at single file, and a ruddy glare, seen very ominously red and bright under this lowering sky, showed itself ahead of them.

"That's one of Howel Farf's candles," Luned heard one of the men in front of her say.

The glare died away as suddenly as it had appeared. But soon afterwards the wind, as they

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emerged from a screen of dark trees, brought a distinct rumour of men's voices, confusedly hurrahing and hooting.

"That should be at Arberth," said the same man who had spoken before. He had barely said it, ere he turned in his saddle and made as if he would scrutinize Luned's features. "Confound this bat's vespers!" he said; "I thought I saw this young squire's face somewhere before, but I can't see him full stroke. Weren't you with my lord of Kemes at Arberth a few days ago, young sir?"

"Silence there!" called the captain.

But the man was full of his discovery and announced it to the captain now.

"All right, Bernard," the captain replied drily; "if our young squire of rabbits has been to Arberth before it will do him no harm to go there again. And if he knows my lord of Kemes, he will have red wine of Crete for supper, instead of Caermarthen ale."

But Luned felt that her chances were, if anything, bettered by Bernard's discovery.

When they came at last on a highway, as they emerged from a narrow dingle up which they had been travelling slowly, the road was alive with the dark forms of people, on foot and horseback, all hurrying toward the narrow straggling street that stretched below and above the castle on its separate mound. Luned saw that the street was dotted with

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wavering lights—torches, lanterns—and in the very midst of it burned an immense bonfire. One name seemed to be on everybody's lips, for whenever one of the passers-by opened his mouth, it seemed to be to utter the same ominous three syllables, "Howel Farf!"

Near the bonfire a hogshead of ale had been broached, and two or three pedlars were crying out tinsel trinkets here, specifics for every ailment there, after the fashion of their craft, while a crowther * was fiddling and singing a crazy ballad. But the newcomers, as one must notice, in spite of the great temptation of the bonfire, the barrel of free ale, the fiddler, and the seductive rascals with the fairings and omnipotent pills, hastened on to a great house up the street—one of those superior hostelries maintained by abbotine economy for the refection of wayfarers. The troop of mounted men-at-arms in whose midst Luned rode a prisoner had some trouble to clear a way for its passage up the street and through the people to the castle. The crowd, made up in motley proportions of Norman, Flemish and Welsh ingredients, was ale-ripe, and prepared for mischief. Pewter mugs and flagons of ale were thrust upon the troopers, who, nothing loth, drank, as they were brought to a standstill now and again. And every time anyone offered a cup, he cried out, as if he gave a toast, "Howel Farf!"

* A fiddler.

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The noise, the confused lights, the bonfire, the drunkenness, gave the scene, in Luned's eyes, a kind of infernal effect. In the midst of it her thoughts darted back to Perrot, whom she had first seen at Arberth here within the great castle; and from Perrot they turned to the island and its sea-quiet and the silence of Iago in commune with the stars, and last to Malen. Ay, where was Malen now, and where Perrot?

Another moment, and the gross reality of the ruddy half darkness had seized again on her senses. She grew momently more terrified by the moving, shouting, fire-lit faces—masked, distorted, twisted by the red glare and the black shadows cast by the bonfire. She was too confused indeed to gather the real meaning of what she saw and heard. The only thing that emerged clearly in her mind was the repeated cry of the name she most dreaded. What could it mean? Was it the hour of his triumph? If so, why were these Norman retainers of the Perrots and Mortimers allowed free passage? It was only when, after passing the bonfire, they drew near the abbots' hostelry, that she recovered her composure and dared to look about her freely. As she did so, there was another check to their progress—the captain of the troop had pulled up to speak to a soldierly old man on horseback coming the other way; and again she seemed to catch the words when he pointed to the lighted town and open, unshuttered casement of the hostelry, "Howel Farf!"

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When they resumed their way up the street the captain, whose curiosity had evidently been aroused, forced a way for his horse with his sword out, so as to brush rudely aside the inquisitive crowd and ride within a pace or two of the door of the hostelry; and where he passed it was easy for the serpentine body of his troop to wend its way after him. In this wise, Luned too was carried close by the house, and could see without hindrance right into the interior of the great common apartment whose floor was a step or two above the street level. It was lit, she could see as she drew more near, by a rousing fire on the open hearth and by a number of candles. But it was not until she had come into the full flood of light from the wide doorway that she saw how a long table had been dragged forward, so as to be easily scanned from the road without. It was stuck round with lighted candles set in small lumps of clay, the better to give the folk without a good view of the ghastly thing in its midst. For oh, behold, on the table a man's head, set upright on a base of encrimsoned candle-clay; a death's-head with a proud, ironical face, made more dreadful in its ivory pallor by the black locks on its brow and the lustrous black beard spread before it: the terrible head of HOWEL FARF.

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CHAPTER XXIII

RHOSSER AND JESTYN

LUNED did not reach the castle with the rest of the troop, and she knew nothing that night of the doings that broke up the black wake of Howel Farf. She was seen by her fellow-troopers swaying in her saddle, unable to keep her seat; and she was lifted from her horse and carried straight into a neighbouring house, where a famous old woman (member of a mysterious craft), Hannah fach, tended her and brought her round, and gave her a soothing draught to make her sleep. So it was she did not hear the coming of another troop of horsemen that invaded Arberth within two hours of her arrival, or their halloo that echoed and rang again, startling the night, the night-wakers around the bonfire, nay, the very stones in the street.

These invaders were no trim Norman troopers, all of a piece and tricked out in steel, but a score of Welsh squires and gentlemen, whose accoutrements were at haphazard splendid or shabby, and who rode horses and mountain ponies of all shapes and sizes.

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At their head rode a gaunt man on a tall black horse. A ruddy beard, a face hollow and long, were his, like those of a man who has been sick almost to the death. He led his followers in at an angry charge, one hand up in the air, while the mob scattered, the houses shook; and so to the very door of the hostelry. There he leapt off, the terrified crowd gaping at him and his followers in wonder, and muttering superstitious terror, while he roughly seized on the nearest loiterer to hold his horse. He strode then, as a man might enter a church, deliberately up the door-steps and to the fatal table, recking nothing of the noise, or the Norman danger behind him. The table was but a couple of strides from the door,—and he who strode was Rhosser. His men made a circle with their horses about the door of the inn.

"Oh, Howel bach!" was all Rhosser said, as, stretching out a long arm, he put his hand on the fatal black head of his deadliest enemy and his nearest kinsman.

Only one other had dismounted with him, a dark young man, with moustaches curled like a bird's feather on cheeks which were hardly less pale than those of the death's-head within the house. He had ridden a fine-bred chestnut Arab with a red leather bridle, who threw up its deer-like head excitedly at the lights and noises, but was less blown by the ride hither than any horse ridden in that wild foray. The young man entered the house

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with Rhosser as closely as if he was his shadow. He turned his face away as he handed Rhosser the black handkerchief, in which the death's-head was reverently wrapped.

Then Rhosser, as he turned to go, said, "Come, Jestyn!" It was Jestyn, in fact, who, escaping from the hurly-burly, had carried Rhosser the news of Howel's death and accompanied him hither.

As they were about to ride away, when Rhosser had slung the death's-head to his saddle, Jestyn's little horse neighed loudly in the street; and Luned, within the house of Hannah fach, heard that neigh, and started up from her uneasy sleep, crying, "Oh, Gringolet!"

"What is the matter then?" asked the good woman, who, it need not be said, had her suspicions about the sex of her guest.

"Oh, nothing," said Luned; "I thought I was at Rhôs;" and she fell asleep again.

Meanwhile, Rhosser and his men, intent on her rescue, rode on to the friendly shelter of a house near Carew, attached to lands of the White Abbey, and there spent the night.

But, starting early next morning for Abereli, they encountered Cadno, a pitiable figure, his face mottled, his eyes swollen with bruises, his leather tunic hanging in tags, as a result of last night's doings; and he told them he had seen the Maid of Rhôs on her way northward. So, somewhat mystified, they

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wheeled about and returned to the oak woods a mile below Arberth; and Jestyn volunteered to go on into the village and find out what had become of Luned.

There, his air of gentility and impassive fine manner served him so well that he easily passed for a visitor to the castle. The Roman visage of Hannah fach was one of the first he caught sight of in the place. She was standing at her own door, having despatched Luned, so she said, on a borrowed Welsh pony, in the escort of two gentlemen, friends of hers, who had been enjoying themselves like gentlemen at the wake last night. The young squire, she declared, could not have better company, and would have the pleasure of their company as far as St. Clear's.

The two gentlemen, it should be observed, were neither more nor less than two of the pedlars whom we saw dispensing their wares by bonfire-light on Luned's arrival; and they observed such an inclination to pull up their mules at every change-house, and there to discover their wares and refresh their hearts with a little ale-tattle over last night's hearty sensations, that she fairly rode off at about the fifth stop.

But such as they were, the pedlars had at least served to keep her in the right road, which she missed soon after giving them the slip. The consequence was she took the road to Laugharne, instead

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of that to St. Clear's, and then, vexed by the determined way in which the road bore southward, she attempted a track that led her into a long meadow full of tidal ditches on the banks of the Taf, where the track gradually dwindled away to nothing. She had still not sighted anything like the sign of a way out, when she heard distinctly a horse following fast. She was now riding along the riverside, sometimes on the salt marsh, sometimes picking her way betwixt tidal mud and grass. She chirruped to her pony and whipped him up, but he made no way; and they were brought up by a muddy inlet which, she saw, they must skirt ere it could safely be crossed. So, casting along its side, she saw the horseman coming at a hopelessly rapid gallop, and making a cut across the short tide-washed turf towards her.

Fifty paces would carry her over the mud of the inlet at a safe point. Ere her fat pony had trotted even that short distance, the horseman was within hail. He called; she turned, and saw it was Jestyn; and Jestyn riding Gringolet. Still associating him with Howel Farf, she was seized with terror. He called out to her to stay.

"No, I won't—I won't stay," she cried, and instantly set her pony to charge down through the awful basin of slime and mud. He plunged through it successfully so far, down to the stream, and through the water, but failed to keep his footing

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on the opposite bank, where the mud was even deeper.

Luned felt him slip, make desperate efforts to plant his fore-feet, while the mud flew in a spattering shower all round, and then she recognised that they were fairly trapped. What was she to do? The poor beast threatened to slip back into the slime and water. He groaned, snorted, struggled furiously. She disengaged her feet from the stirrups, and then was aware of Jestyn and Gringolet right above them.

"Give me your hand," said Jestyn, dismounting, and leaning over from the bank.

She looked up, with a glance of disgust and despair.

"No," she cried, foolishly slipping off her horse's back into the slime.

But he seized her hand in spite of her, and with the other, catching the lap of the grey tunic, he gave so vigorous a tug that he landed her on safe ground, and at the same time almost tore right off a flap of the tunic.

"Now for the *merlen*," he said; and rapping the stranded beast twice smartly under the chin with his riding-stock, he dexterously captured its reins. Thereupon, with a startling whoop, he fairly tugged it out of the mire.

In doing this, he showed himself so adroit and good-humoured, that Luned was, spite of her feeling

* Pony.

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against him, impressed. She was too honourable, of course, under the circumstances, to seize Gringolet, as she might have done, and ride away; but she had taken his reins, while he went through a hundred extravagances of delight at finding her. Now his nose was thrust into her hand, now into her face; now he half reared up, now shook his head, and whinnied again in his excitement. Luned, her hand on his nose, stood looking from her damaged tunic to her captor, with nostrils dilating and eyes flashing defiance.

"And now, good sir," she said, "you count me your prisoner perhaps?"

Jestyn smiled, and she noticed then how frightfully pale his face was. "Not so, demoiselle, unless you so desire it!"

"What then, sir, if I do not?"

"Whatever you *do* desire, demoiselle."

"I only wish you to leave me."

"Nay, but that is impossible. Your father bid me ride after you, and he is following after with others. I will, if you will permit me, act as your chevalier until he comes, or, if need be, as far as Rhôs itself."

She looked in his face, doubting utterly what he said; then, embarrassed, fell to stroking Gringolet's neck. "My father?" she said; "my father? He lies a-dying; he lies low on his sick-bed at Rhôs."

"No!" he said: "he left it yesterday. Did you not know? Come, the tide is flowing. There is no

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time to be lost. He is following, with others, in the road from Arberth to Rhôs. Come, I can show you a short way to Sarthi-side, and so home. Ah," he continued, "you called me a coward before; but you will be no worse off with me than without me, for I do happen to know the road to Rhôs, and I fear you don't."

His argument was sound, his bearing courteous. She put a foot in Gringolet's stirrup, and was up before he could lend her a hand. She was riding on impetuously, forgetting, in her confusion, that the pony was so poor a mount for him, besides being so spent with its mud-bath, when he cried out to her to turn to the right, as the riverside was not safe.

She followed his direction without question, then and afterwards, in that long ride to Rhôs, during which they did not overtake Rhosser. But she so far maintained her reserve as to keep Jestyn at a groom's distance, which indeed, because of the disparity of the animals they rode, was an easy thing to do.

But once, a heavy, tightly wedged gate, at an old grange at Sarnau, two miles or more from Caermarthen, stopped her, and he came up; as she was fingering ruefully the torn skirt of her tunic, he said,—

"Oh, demoiselle, you ought to sever it, and give it to me for a token—in memory of this sad adventure and of your pretty hackney which I rode, and——"

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"What," she said, "this poor torn flap of the grey tunic? It is not a fair token. Besides, what could you do with it?"

"Wear it, demoiselle, on my adventures in the fields of Normandy, where, since my dark foster-father is dead, I must go, as befits a poor gentleman, to seek my fortune. Sir Philip, on his return from Kemes, has promised to take me in his company."

"Oh," she cried at this, feeling piqued without quite knowing why, "you are going to France, are you?" She could not resist adding, as the gate was opened and she rode through, "I should have thought Wales was wide enough for your courage!"

She had no sooner spoken than she remembered the letter she carried, left by Morgan Ola' for his "son Jestyn." She felt it would come from her now with a bad grace; but she drew it out, saying, "Oh, sire, I bear a letter from Dinas for you."

He took it, bowing, and instantly dropped behind her again on his fat pony. He did not overtake her again till they reached Sarthi water, where Malen had found her on the morning of Howel's raid. When she had crossed the stream, which she found low but amber-clear, as a mountain stream can look in autumn sun, she drew rein for him to come abreast with Gringolet.

"Your father," she said, "lies buried at Dinas Moryn. I hope you will find the birch on his grave that I planted there in the spring when you go to

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the island. I wept many tears for him to think he should lie so lonely there in the sand and clay; and I—I am glad," she added, "you have made your peace, now my uncle is dead, with my father. How was it you came to meet with him?"

Jestyn turned paler at the recollections of Howel Farf thus started. "I carried the news to Rhôs."

"Oh, I see," she said, turning pale too; and she drew with a trembling hand the little silver-tricked dagger Efa had given her, and severed the torn flap of her tunic and handed it to him. "If you are in truth going to France," she said, "you may have it; but you—you will never tell who gave it."

"Never!" said he fervently, kissing it and putting it away with the letter in his bosom.

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CHAPTER XXIV

RHÔS

MAY, when Luned was snatched away from Rhôs,—September brought her back. The riverside trees, the ferns, the grass, all were changed. Autumn brooded in the woods around, till she grew almost afraid to notice the change. September lay ripe on the reeds in the meadow, the yellowing ferns were tall as men on the slope. The silence in the woods was like a deep sleep. But then a wood-pigeon cooed in the oak wood and she saw the turret of the house as she skirted the meadow; and two red heifers grazing there raised their heads to look at her. Every tree, every bit of old wall, brought a little rapture of remembrance to her heart. She touched Gringolet's ear, and he snorted and carried her so at a canter to the gate.

But once she had come within hail of the gate, a soft hubbub—noises and signs of life in the court-yard—told her the house and its environs were awake and busy as noon could make them. It told her Rhosser and his party must have returned. They

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had, in truth, while loitering for Jestyn to overtake them, been overtaken by Malen, astride the pony Perrot had left at Abereli; and she had told them they would find both Jestyn and the little maid herself at Rhôs. So they rode on. Their horses, too many for the stalls, were tethered at the gates and within the yard; and men in travel-stained tunics and torn smocks were going to and fro—some limping, some bearing smoking dishes—betwixt court and hall, which made a cheerful hubbub about the place. The great door of the hall from the yard stood wide open. Luned rode up to the door without dismounting; and then, a shyness due to her boy's garb overtaking her at the sight of the threshold which she had hitherto crossed only in maid's attire, she paused, hesitated, and then finally rode Gringolet right into the middle of the hall through the arched doorway.

There an unusual cheer of voices was heard. A busy throng of folk were gathered about the long table, Rhosser and his men still in their riding-cloaks. All turned, and called out in one accord, as she rode in and paused in mid-floor, her face like a pale flower in the umber shadows, her slender form swaying as Gringolet came to a halt.

Then three started up at once, and one was Rhosser, and one her mother; but another taller lady in a black gown stood by. Rhosser himself it was lifted the little maid down in his arms. She had

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only time to see it was the Lady of Llanfair that stood there, before he strained her so heartily to his breast that her eyes were muffled in his riding-cloak.

But when Rhosser had cried, "Oh, Eluned fach!" again and again, Lowry remonstrated, with a tender jealousy: "Why, Rhosser, you will stifle the child! and, indeed, she is a child no longer. Let me see her. She is grown tall at a stroke!"

And every maid in hall wept for joy, as she saw how Lowry drew Luned aside, and scanned her lad's locks, and fell to kissing her.

Rhosser would have had Luned to sit down at his side at the table just as she was; but her mother would not hear of it, and Efa of Llanfair, after embracing her, said, drawing a hand over her cut locks, which Malen had kept clipped all this while,—

"Ah, Rhosser, it needs time for her locks to grow; but let us see Luned again in a maid's gown, and a white gown, for that is maidenly and for heart's delight. Oh, child," she added, "indeed, indeed you have brought wondrous and joyous delight back to me, who thought to be always now an unhappy woman!"

"Well, well," said Rhosser, "maid or man-at-arms, here she is again. But put her on a maid's gown, a white maid's gown!" So the Lady of Llanfair and her mother led her up the stair, whence such pretty pauses of laughter and chatter as may be imagined reached the ears of those below.

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It was at this pause, while Gringolet was being led off in triumph to stall, that Jestyn arrived, having had to lead his pony afoot up the meadow.

When at last the three descended, Luned freshly attired in a long maiden gown of pure white, there stood Jestyn, in his hand the letter that she had carried to him from Dinas Moryn, and nearly lost at the hands of the Rouen captain. And this letter, Jestyn presently, when the capons, and manchets of bread, and mountain mutton, and mountains of beef, had been consumed, gave her to read. Morgan Ola' had superscribed it: "To my little son, when he shall come to man's estate," and it ran :—

"*Jestyn, when it shall be thou art come to thy years, it shall be a good service to call back from Howel's evil estreatment all that fair demesne at Miscin and otherwhere in thy native county of Morganwg, which was mine and thy mother's. The deeds and papers rest with the attorney Jenkyn, at Caerdyf, and the proof lies there. Do this, my little son, and do what in thee lies to repair the wrong and great mischief wrought by Howel to thy father and mother; and be kind to the least of those that have suffered (as God knows thy poor father hath) at his unnatural hands. And so, farewell.*"

This letter, Luned, who had already told how she had saved it and lost the phial, must in turn read to

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Rhosser and Lowry. For the master and mistress of Rhôs had begun to take a singular interest in Jestyn, and had been talking much at table of Howel Farf's death, and what should become of his estates, and whether Jestyn were wise now to go abroad or no.

"You need not go to France now!" said the Lady of Rhôs, looking keenly from the young man to her daughter.

"Nay," said Rhosser, "let him see life like a man, and then come home for a Welsh wife."

"Yes," said Jestyn, with a halting voice, looking not at Rhosser or his wife, but at Luned, "the rust of Howel (Heaven help him!) is still on me. I shall not feel free till I have seen foreign lands. Besides," he said, turning now and looking directly at Luned, "demoiselle, I have still to prove myself no coward."

Her cheeks flushed, her eyes glanced away uneasily, at this unexpected revival of her continual quip at his expense.

"What is this of cowards?" cried Rhosser. "Old heart of me, maid, what do you ask of poor men? Was it not Jestyn stood siege at Castle Meyric by Howel's side, ay, till that old cat, Cymeida, stabbed him?"

"The lady Cymeida?" ejaculated Luned, looking from her father to Jestyn.

Jestyn crumbled a piece of bread betwixt his fingers as he caught her eye.

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"Yes, the lady Cymeida," her father continued: "'tis said she was paid to do it; but Howel had once paid court to her, perhaps by way of joke, and then he laughed at her; and I doubt it was her sweetest revenge."

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CHAPTER XXV

HOWEL FARF REAPPEARS

NEXT day, Jestyn must take his way to Caerdyf, and then back to Abereli and Dinas Moryn, to attend to his father's affairs, before he set out on his foreign adventures with Sir Philip. Rhosser insisted on bestowing his famous black horse, which he had dubbed "Black Lion," upon Jestyn for the journey.

"It is good to be a man," said Luned to Jestyn, as they stood by the hearth, as custom was, to say farewell—"to be a man, and to go to far countries. You will learn such wisdom there as Iago told me of, and such courtesy as never was. But you will not forget to speak Welsh, and you will come again to Rhôs."

As she spoke, her cheeks (sea-tanned to a soft brown and damask) turned very pale. Jestyn, whom we know for a pale cheek, turned as red. And this is the true sign, they say, of hearts' exchange. In truth, Luned, who had only thought all these months of her perfect happiness when Rhôs should be hers

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and Rhosser himself again, now found her fancy looking out uneasily into that wider world which was drawing Jestyn away.

"What shall I bring you when I return from France?" he asked.

"Oh," she said simply, "a set of chess, that we may play here within the hearth on the long winter nights."

"But what shall I do that shall most prove my courage?"

"Nothing, and anything. Nothing, save use sword, as Sir Gawain did, for any poor maid in trouble——"

Here Lowry came forward saying (for she knew nothing of the token he already carried in his bosom —the piece of the grey tunic), "But, child, do not let him go without a charm. Give him thy little witch-pipe. And it shall save him, and bring him safe again to the hearth of Rhôs."

Shall it be said that Luned rather shivered at the thought of giving it away? It was like giving away a part of herself. Lowry, like a wise woman, turned away as Luned put it about his neck. And then, very courteously he bowed and kissed Lowry's hand, and so was gone.

* * * * *

Rhosser and Jestyn held their way in silence till they came to the top of the dingle through which

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runs Nant Glas, at the mouth of which is the old hostelry of the "Cigfran" or Raven. Then Rhosser, seeing the younger man still hold his head down, more like one abased by some shame than by sorrow, would have changed his dark thoughts for him.

"Jestyn," said he, "I saw you would drink nothing but a cup of small ale before we started. Now you need a cup of Poitou—it is the one good thing these gentry from the South bring us, and there's a pretty keg of it at Nansi's. You reddened at saying farewell, now you are pale. No young man should be so pale."

Jestyn shook his head.

"Oh, sire, if I was sorrowful, it was not for want of warmth within, but because I thought, the only friends I have I am leaving, and may never see again. Last night I dreamt that one came to my bedside, and when I looked it was but the head of Howel Farf, which appeared to hang in the mid air from a weaver's pole. The eyes were fast shut, but the mouth spoke, and it said,—'Lle mai fy nghorff?' (Where is my body?) and then it said thrice,—'Jestyn, beware Rhosser!'"

"That Howel should hate me after the death of him and the rescue at Arberth! Ha, Howel, Howel Farf! But I was never afraid of him living, and I am not afraid of him dead. You are too young for such black dreams, Jestyn."

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"I cannot forget his death's-head. The face—I still see it, and every time I see it a shadow falls on the green grass, an evil shadow falls on my fancy." He spoke in a dispirited tone.

"Come now, boy—for you are no more—this is no spirit for the road. A cup of Poitou at the 'Cigfran,' and you will see a sun in every pool on the way to Caerdyf. Look at me, I have sins in my head, and have been near the baulk of my wits. There's a red-wax warrant over me and my lands in Elfed; ay, and there's one thing I wish to ask you, Jestyn, when you get to Caemarthen, ask for Ieuan the Silversmith. I must have a thousand crowns to buy off a warrant that lies waiting me at Pembroke. You can go surety for me, if you wish. If not, there is Rhys of Uchdrud. But we must not fret, Jestyn. For what does it matter? Ask a cup of Poitou, and you will have your answer! Love is like sap in the tree. The sap makes it sulk, till the spring sets it flowing. Howel Farf gave you a chill in the night, boy. Now forget him, or take your adventure as he took his. Eat, drink, kill and be killed, and make no mouth about it. Drink a cup of Poitou with me, and you will cut the throat of your *trallod** and ease your blood."

Jestyn was ready enough to believe in Rhosser's medicine for every one but himself. He rather hugged his melancholy, as youth may when the

* Malaise, trouble.

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humour is half in its own fantasy, and only half in circumstance; for this gives melancholy an illusive air of being a thing apart and precious. As Jestyn dismounted at the ale-house with Rhosser, it did not seem like a place to dispel melancholy. They gave their horses to an urchin, who was carrying a crock of water to a wash-tub.

Within they found a mud-walled apartment, with one aperture beside the door, a window with five bars across it, much of the shape and fashion of a five-barred gate. In a further apartment, which served as kitchen, a fire smoked dolorously, but the outer one, where they found seats, was clear save of an occasional waft.

"The place is poor," said Rhosser; "what matter when the wine is good? One cup of red wine will make a booth into a palace. Here, Nansi, bring a quart-potful, and two cups!"

Nansi came, a red-eyed, lean woman, choking spasmodic coughs at the reek.

"How is your bad husband?" said Rhosser.

Elias was one of Rhosser's tenants and retainers, and his wickedness in Nansi's eyes lay in neglecting his own affairs for his master's. Nansi coughed only in reply to the question. When the wine came—"I began to think, Nansi," said Rhosser, "that my dead kinsman Howel had been down to your cellar when he was beleaguering Rhôs."

Nansi coughed. "He came, him and his boys,

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and two black hounds. He had all the ale and metheglin there was—they said Rhosser would pay for it—but I had the keg of wine safe under the fern-stack! They drank a two-three shillings' worth of ale alone, and never a farthing for it. They gave the bloodhounds metheglin in a platter, which the beasts lapped up. But for your honour — little enough he did for you—I am glad my lord Howel is gone. *Ie, yn wir.* He was half-demon; the country was the blacker for him." She coughed again.

"You will spoil our wine with your coughing," said Rhosser, who had a curious jealousy for Howel's reputation; "get outside to your tub, Nansi, while we take what comfort we can within. An ale-wife has no business to be coughing at her customers." He put down a silver piece.

Nansi, who knew his humour, took up the piece, and went out. They heard her still coughing aggressively over her washing-tub. Rhosser poured out two cups.

"*Iechyd da*, Jestyn; good health!" he cried, lifting his; "good health, Jestyn, as Cousin Howel was used to call you; and a safe coming back again! As for the little maid's silver whistle, it is a charm to keep you in the day of swords. But bethink you, it was but a child that gave it!"

Rhosser poured out a second cup of wine even as he spoke; he drained it with no more hesitation than

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the first. Jestyn was disturbed, fearing that Rhosser did not take his relation to Luned seriously.

He felt uneasy, too, as he noticed Rhosser's second cup passed with a comfortable stretching out of his great limbs, as if for a long sitting.

There were reasons why Rhosser should avoid even the lighest grape-blood: his own blood fermented only too quickly in his brain. What would they say at Rhôs if they thought Jestyn had tempted him to Nanşi's!

Jestyn moved uncomfortably on the settle as he pondered on it. Finally an idea struck him. He got up, and stepped to the open door.

"What is your haste, Jestyn?" cried Rhosser.

"None—but what horn was that I heard in the wood?" He had not heard one, but it was the best way of rousing Rhosser's curiosity that occurred to him.

The effect of the imagined horn was remarkable. Rhosser leant his body forward, so as to bring his ear nearer the door. Then his face changed, and he thrust out his foot, and hastily pushed the door to. The door closed, he looked relieved; but he poured out a third great draught of Poitou, and took an ominous gulp of it.

Jestyn uneasily watched him do this.

"Who blows the French horn here in Elfed?" he asked, supping his wine to hide his discomfort.

"Hush!" replied Rhosser: "would you bring us

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both to destruction? It was only Howel, Jestyn, it was only Howel Farf that ever blew French horn in Elfed. Ha, Jestyn, you are right. Howel will not rest till he has his body, and head and body lie together safe in the rood. And it is Rhôs—Rhôs he will haunt, haunt day and night, till that be done!"

He drained his cup as he ended, and stood up. Jestyn noticed that he trembled, and his eyes were wild. Their glance wandered alternately between Jestyn and the door.

"Jestyn," he said, "we part here. If evil should come to me, and you hear of it, I charge you be good to my house-folk at Rhôs and my little maid. And be good to Lowry. I hear horses without there." He opened the door.

"Horses?" said Jestyn, surprised, for he heard no noise of hoofs through the open door. The quickened, startled tones in which Rhosser announced horses had momentarily diverted Jestyn from the serious appeal that had opened his last speech.

Nansi appeared now at the door, thinking they had called her, and coughing as vigorously as ever.

"Did you call for more from the keg? You always did drink fast, my master."

"No," said Rhosser, to Jestyn's relief; "horses—I heard horses going towards Rhôs through the wood. There is an old gambo* road runs below there

* Wood-sledge.

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that the woodcutters use. Heu—they were riding it like hunters. I must be after them."

Already he was out and up in the saddle.

"I will be after you," cried Jestyn.

"No, no: remember what I begged you. Farr'well!"

And Rhosser was gone.

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CHAPTER XXVI

JESTYN HEARS THE VOICE

JESTYN still hesitated whether to follow Rhosser; but his instinct told him that to reappear at Rhôs so soon after his taking leave would look foolish. Of what service could he be if he were there? So he took his proper road to the south-east, and before noon caught sight of Caermarthen Castle in the distance, with the green meadows of the Vale of Towy spread wide before him amid the bordering forest-lands.

He had come to an old clearing at the edge of an oak-wood, from which the land sloped away toward the valley. He was on the threshold of the outer world. He was leaving Rhôs and Elfed behind, and his mood of melancholy, returning, told him he was leaving, perhaps for ever, the pleasant region of Luned. The rich autumnal haze that hung over the scene before him increased his sense of loss. Formerly, in spring, he had ridden on the other side of the valley escorting her, with Howel Farf. His

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melancholy overtook him, a black rider at his side, as he recalled all that had passed since then.

He put his hand into his bosom. Her little pipe was there. He drew it out—mute reminder of her and the tunes she had charmed out of its stops. Ah, her fingers had touched them, her lips had blown the spirit into them. He pulled up his horse, dismounted, tethered it to a tree, and then sat on the turfy brink of the valley, to try and conjure its notes to life. He did not understand the trick of it. It only emitted crazy tones; but the sense of the subtle stops under his fingers and the delicate tube at his lips was enough in itself. One clear note he captured; then he shut his eyes on the scene before him, in the hope of recovering the elusive likeness of her breathing, ardent face.

He was interrupted in this rapture of the whistle by a step and a voice. A figure, no taller than a boy, but attired in a black conventual robe, strapped, for the convenience of the road, with a belt, stood beside him. Another younger man held a horse at a short distance.

"You have come from Rhôs?" asked the little cleric: "which way to Rhôs?"

The question was simple, the voice was full of arresting qualities.

"This voice," thought Jestyn to himself, as he rose up to reply, "is disturbing; it is masterful and courteous, and unlike any I have heard." Indeed, its

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tones succeeded to the one clear note he had drawn from Luned's pipe, like a trumpet of messengers from another sphere.

Saying that it was true he had come from Rhôs, he began to give the necessary directions for the way there, glancing from the questioner to his companion, who was holding his horse. This companion bore, as Jestyn saw, a small harp wrapped in a deer-skin strapped to his shoulders. The harper had long yellow hair, and a face which Jestyn instinctively read as that of a sensitive youth ended and a sensual middle age begun.

"Rhosser," asked the cleric: "he is at Rhôs?"

Jestyn wondered, as he gazed now into the cleric's eyes, which were like grey steel, if his designs upon Rhosser were in any way hurtful. No, he judged not, and he proceeded to say he had only parted from Rhosser an hour or two ago at the Raven.

The cleric bit his lip.

"Wherefore,—should I ask it, young sir,—wherefore at the Raven?"

"My host halted there, and stayed to speed me in a parting cup."

"Ha, young man," said the cleric, "you did no kindness to Rhosser to drink with him."

"That I know," said Jestyn: "it was against my wish. You seem to know, and yet I think you do not know the strong master of Rhôs."

"I know him, and know him as strong as weak.

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Nature built such a man for a tower,—to save his region and all the land with it. Now he wastes himself, and all is wasted with him. Ha, sire, what think you? Out of this country over the marshes all is in confusion. The King has sinned; the King's crown must fall. The Queen is even now landed, with five thousand of French swords. His realm will be rent. Then is the hour for our ancient house. One leader like this strong-weak Rhosser, were he but in his strength, and our land of lands is delivered for ever. For hark you, the Norman is changing, the Norman is passing and changing. The De Spencers (despite their pretty conceit of King, people, and none between) have come to nought. The De Spencers fall with the King. Why? They forgot the Church. And the Church, too, has lost her way. But the Church will find herself; and she will find swords! Sire, if you are a friend of Dyfed, lend us your sword ere it is too late!"

Jestyn was shaken and moved by the voice. His face grew troubled and returned to its melancholy. Then he slowly dropped his head.

"I am bound abroad," he said, "in the train of Sir Philip, a gentleman of Kemes. My sword is tied. And for the Master of Rhôs, he had but lately his hurt, as you may have heard; and I doubt if——"

He gazed uncertainly at the cleric, not liking to say more or state too plainly Rhosser's distemper to a stranger bound to his house.

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"You would tell me of Rhosser's wandering mind; but there is a grace that can heal the heart, and there is at Caermarthen a physician, Iago, who can heal the body. But I have a more delicate doctor with me"—he pointed to the harper. "His harp healed the madness of Meilyr. Euryn has turned from the wanton airs, and the ditties, fanciful and amorous, which he once composed. He has renounced the delight of wine, and the daughters of Eve, which were his. He has lent his harp to Heaven."

Euryn had gradually approached during the latter part of this speech. His eyes were irresistibly drawn to Luned's silver pipe, which Jestyn still held.

"Ha," he said, "I have seen the twin of that silver reed! Where had you that? I would give gold for it. Was it the little pipe of her some call the Whistling Maid? Let me try it if it is indeed the same, for once I heard the maid play music of mine on it; and it was more delicious than an ousel's dreams."

But Jestyn slipped the pipe hastily into the fold of his tunic.

"Pardon me, sirs; I have already lingered too long."

The thought of the owner of the pipe and of her story of the grave on Dinas Moryn was too teasing to let him loiter, or receive such ideas as the little cleric proclaimed

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"Stay," said the cleric, as he moved away, "do not heed Euryn. A musician has the curiosity of his craft. But think—why waste your sword abroad, and feed French lilies with your blood? Think of your father, and his wrongs, and the wrongs of us all."

"I think of them."

"How then, sire?"

"I go, good father, to my father's grave."

"Where then?"

"You spoke but now of Iago the physician. At Dinas Moryn he is, where Morgan ap Jestyn, my father, lies in the sands in an unkind grave. I go to carry his dust to the rood."

"The White Abbey, my son, may consecrate the sands of Dinas Moryn. I will see to it. Come to me at the White Abbey, and talk of this and of our cause, when you have been to Dinas. Ask for the Archdeacon of Brecon. Your father shall yet sleep in peace. . . . Candles shall be burnt for his spirit. Ha, Jestyn—who art young—lend us your sword, and save Dyfed, and all the Kymric south! I will see Rhosser. He shall meet us at the White Abbey. Come there to us!"

Jestyn had stood as if under strong spells during this last appeal, his hand on his horse's bridle. The grey eyes of the cleric held him, looked into his very heart. Now he shook his head as if to shake off the urgency of their persuasions. He felt all the

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currents of his blood quick with adventure and romance. The passion of youth and its desire were in the murmur within his pulses, as the blood went in crimson to his cheeks and brows. Involuntarily his hand stole into his tunic and touched the pipe. A thousand melodies tingled in his fingers at the touch; and their refrain—Luned!

The spell of the voice was broken.

"I cannot, I cannot," he cried, in a final reply to the cleric's appeal.

"Oh, wherefore?" said the little cleric, looking reproachfully at him. "I read trouble to come in your face. Beware of the follies that wait you in yonder town. Why not be one with us?"

Jestyn was already in his saddle.

"Do you not see why?" said Euryn, intervening.

"In truth, not," said the cleric.

"Because he carries another counsellor in his bosom—the Whistling Maid's whistle, the little witch-pipe of St. Brieux."

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE LITTLE GLEE-WOMAN

WHEN Jestyn retook the road to Caermarthen, he urged his horse to a reckless gallop, in his hurry to put behind him all delaying thoughts—the cleric, Euryn, Rhôs, and the Maid of Rhôs. It was but a steep track between trees that he followed. The autumn litter was already thick on its turf, and the soft sods flew from the Black Lion's plunging hoofs like so many startled sparrows. In this way he had almost reached the end of the descent, when rounding a corner, he saw the way blocked before him. A contrary ass was at odds with its convoy—an old man and three women—and stood right across the track.

Jestyn could not pull up his horse in time, and crying aloud, in a trice had charged the ass and sent it over, while his horse, after a sprawl, recovered itself without pitching him. But in doing so, a chance kick settled the affairs of the unfortunate ass for ever. A howl arose from the old man and one of the women.

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Jestyn, having got his horse in hand, wheeled about and came again to the spot. Two sacks of apples had been the beast's burden. The apples strewed the ground.

"Oh, Jenny, Jenny fach!" wailed the old woman.

Jestyn was overwhelmed by her cries. She and her mate were hardly to be called clad; their faces were wan, bloodless as vellum. The two other women were companions of the road. The younger of these had still one or two soft lines in her sunburnt, swarthy cheeks, and a very vital gleam in her roving black eyes. She was not attired like a country girl, and a pair of cracked cymbals which she carried in one hand showed that she was probably going to play her part of glee-woman in the town.

"How much is your ass worth?" asked Jestyn of the old man, but looking at the girl, "and where were you taking it?"

"She was a good beast, she was, good as two: she was worth three groats and more—*ië wir!* We were going to the town. 'Tis a holy day there to-morrow—three thieves to be hung and a scarlet wench whitewashed before the market-house. Three groats and more, your worship: for how shall we now cry 'Fálau, afálau!'* in the town without our little assyn?"

Jestyn gave them a silver piece, which turned their wails into cries of delight. The girl looked at him,

* Apples, apples!

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her brown eyes softening as they looked. Jestyn saw that above her coarse flannel petticoat a yellow silk bodice emerged at her brown throat. No other clothing had she; she went barefooted like the rest of the party; but there was a suggestion about her whole bearing of a state better than her present one.

He would have asked her questions, but could not bring himself to do it. Instead, he took out another silver piece, and riding a pace nearer, dropped it in her hand. Instantly her roving black eyes became still, but she let the coin slip over her palm to the ground, as if she did not perceive it. One of the other women growled at her, snatched it up and, doing so, moved arms and head in such a way that a likeness to the girl betrayed itself.

Jestyn, disliking this woman, and feeling the day grow darker for these delays, bowed gravely to the party and rode away. The woman who had picked up the coin broke into derisive laughter as he went.

By the time he reached the Black Priory, and entered the northern gate of the town, he had recovered himself somewhat. He made his way to the King's Tavern, near the market-place, and there put up his horse and ordered dinner. The landlord was full of affairs.

"If you but look round the corner," he said, "you will see as tall a gallows as you ever saw, and as red as red ochre can make it; and the pillory beside

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it. There's thieves for the one, and a pretty piece for the other; and nothing to pay. Ye had much better stay here to-night, and see the folk, and the booths, and the thieves, and the wench; and there's a bear came into the town last night, to fight with a bull two hours before noon in the castle-yard."

Jestyn shook his head, and went to see the warden of the castle, who could tell him if the knight, Sir Philip, from Kemes, had passed through the town on his way to Bristo'. No, the knight was expected to-morrow about nightfall, or the next day, and would spend the night at the castle. On the whole, it seemed that fate meant Jestyn to stay here.

Passing Ieuan the silversmith's in the watergate, he saw a set of chess in the window, delicately carved in red and white ivory, on a silver board. He decided to buy these, and send them to the Maid of Rhôs. Returning to the shop, he found he had barely enough money for the set of chess-men; but the silversmith was quite willing to accept his note of hand for the seven crowns. It was less easy to negotiate the thousand crowns for Rhosser. The silversmith was a character—a chess player himself. When Jestyn pressed for the loan, he hummed, and thereupon offered to play Jestyn; who asked him to dine, and to discuss chess and loan with him at his inn.

Now it happened when, having dined, they were sitting comfortably at their game of chess in an upper

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room of the inn, that Jestyn heard a sweet voice singing in the street. He looked out. It was the girl who had been one of the minor actors in the little tragedy of the ass. Her voice was wild and sweet, as she sang an old ballad of Kai and Gwenhwyfar (the Welsh Launcelot and Guinevere), sometimes called

THE SONG OF THE SEVEN CANDLES.

I.

Seven candles round my bed,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
Bring the salt and bring the bread!
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

II.

Then the curtains close, (*she said*
To the damsels, to the damsels,)
Tell him Queen Gwenhwyfar's dead!
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

III.

Tell cruel Kai, Gwenhwyfar's pride,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
Like a queen's, waxed as she died,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

IV.

Yet sadly, too, her fates led on,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
To the far coasts of Afalon!
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

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V.

Tell cruel Kai, with small content,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
She left the beechen leaves of Gwent,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

VI.

Yet, making haste for pride, (*she said*
To the damsels, to the damsels,)
Gwenhwyfar died ere she was dead,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

VII.

Now from her wake let Kai begone,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
To the Haut King in Caledon,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

VIII.

But first, before he leave, (*she said*
To the damsels, to the damsels,) ;
Offer him the salt and bread,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

IX.

If he will eat my sins for me,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
Kai's soul is lost, and mine goes free,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

X.

My soul is mine in Afalon,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
But Kai's must war in Caledon,
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

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XI.

Seven passions, seven wars!
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
Seven candles, seven stars!
(*To her damsels said the Queen*).

XII.

Seven candles round the bed,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels,*)
Bring the salt and bring the bread!
(*To her damsels said Gwenhwyfar,*
Laughed and wept and cried the Queen).

The unglazed tavern window had an oaken shutter half drawn across its opening. Jestyn drew it back further, the better to hear as the ballad went on, and to catch every note of the air, monotonous and plaintive. He could see the girl's head, thrown back, while her roving eyes cast their glances from one side of the street to the other, watchful of alms from the houses and passers-by. He was about to throw out some small coin when he was anticipated by the inmate of a house lower down, on the same side of the street, who must have summoned the girl. Feeling cheated, Jestyn went to the window and leaned out to look. Under another tavern sign, the Red Hound, not a dozen doors away, stood a young man in a handsome tawny surcoat, his legs a-straddle in an attitude of great complacency. He was holding out a coin to the girl, and as she came

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near he caught her arm familiarly, and held it while he questioned her. This did not please Jestyn, who, however, had no excuse for interference, and betook himself again to his game of chess.

"What is it?" said the silversmith.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he replied.

But the other noticed that he had lost his hold on the game, and from having been at an opening which threatened his opponent's queen, he played amiss, and in ten moves had spoilt his game. Two other games followed, to even worse effect. Whereupon the silversmith chose to be offended, and rose from his seat.

"It is well to be seen, sire," he said, "that you do not care to play with me."

Jestyn protested that if he had played amiss it was because his mind was not at ease.

"A young man's mind should be careless," said the silversmith; and he began an edifying homily, not unlike that delivered by Rhosser under the same conditions earlier in the day. He put his doctrine to the test, too, by urging Jestyn to come presently and sup with him at his house in the watergate, when he should taste such wine as would warm his five wits like the blaze on a twelfth-night hearth. To this, Jestyn, anxious about Rhosser's crowns, could not demur. Before proceeding to the silversmith's he sent a messenger to the castle to learn if any sign of the gentleman of Kemes was to be seen. But

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no, he had not yet arrived. Thereupon, making his way to the watergate, he spent the evening in feasting until about two hours after nightfall, when he rose, having satisfactorily, as he thought, persuaded the silversmith into lending the thousand crowns on his surety—if it should be countersigned by the Caerdyf attorney. Pleased at this, he found himself, at their parting, singing over and over the refrain of, "To the damsels, to the damsels!" while the silversmith wagged his head gravely and hiccoughed, "A very rich refrain, very rich! Wowould I were younger!"

When Jestyn reached the street, there was a stir of half-repressed revelry in the air which excited his fancy. He thought of the little glee-woman, and longed for more such singing. The silversmith's chamber had been hot: he would walk as far as the riverside to cool his pulses and see what was going on in the town. He had almost reached the end of the street abutting on the quay, and was noting the cross-trees of a vessel against the sky, when he heard hurried steps beyond him. Hastening on, he was in time to be the witness of a singular episode, which befell as he drew nigh the mouth of a dark alley. So dark was the place indeed, that, save for the arrival on the scene of a sailor advancing from the quay with a ship's lantern, he might not have understood what was going on.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

SWORDS

A GROUP of four or five people stood at the entrance to the alley. As Jestyn slackened his steps he caught the sound of two voices—a superfine young man's voice and a shrill woman's. A few steps more, and he was close upon them, and the sailor advancing too with his lantern made the group clear. Then Jestyn's nerves danced like stretched wires.

What he saw was the singing-girl, the girl of the Gwenhwyfar ballad. A gleam of the lantern gilded her chin and the top of her orange bodice. Beside her stood the woman, her mother, in shrewish discussion with a young man wearing a handsome tawny surcoat. An older man in a cloak stood in the background.

Prudence might have warned Jestyn to pass on. It was not his affair. But as he came abreast the alley, the girl turned her head, saw him, and breathed a desperate whisper,—

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"*Cymorth!*" (Help!) "Help my gentleman!" she cried.

Jestyn paused. The woman turned viciously on the girl with a hideous oath.

"What, have I kept her in bread, while I starved—starved, by Saint John!—all these weeks, but to get the silver crowns for her?" More she said—the bitter voice of a misery too common at the time. At every breath the girl repeated more urgently,—

"*Cymorth!*"

"Pray leave us, sire!" said the young man, in turn addressing Jestyn; "you will only cause offence."

"Yes, be off, you—you donkey-killer, you spotted gentleman. I know you by your black cock's feather!"

Jestyn was at a loss to know what to do.

"You misunderstand, sire!" said the older man, stepping nearer. "The girl is a glee-woman, and sings the ballad of Gwenhwyfar sweeter than words can say. We only need her to sing in my lord Pembroke's masque before the Queen at Bristo'."

"*Cymorth!*" repeated the girl. "Help—it is false. Oh, help me, gentleman!"

"Who and what am I to believe?" cried Jestyn.

"He says we lie!" said the young man, hot all on the moment. "Pray, sir—the alley, the alley. We will settle this on the spot."

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"Nagos!" said a rough voice behind them: it was the sailor with the lantern. "Wench or no wench, my lords, don't fight in the alley. The alley's a rat-hole. Come out on to the quay. There's nobody about. I'll 'ware watch. Come out on to the quay!"

Jestyn, with a gesture to the girl, followed the sailor's lead. The other pair stepped briskly after them towards the waterside. The edge of the quay was defended by wooden posts and chains. Within this there was a clear space, paved with flat stones, partly hidden by a pyramid of ship's bales. Here the sailor set down his ship's lantern, chuckling,—

"Now, 'tis a fight, a fight!" he said. "Wait till I call my mate." And he disappeared into a ship moored at a pitch lower on the quay.

They went through no great preamble.

"Rouen fair fence—cut and triple-cut!" cried the young man: "none of your Welsh twirls and surprises!"

"We are not in Rouen," said Jestyn.

"We are in a rat-hole; but no rat's play!" said the other.

"Your sword is longer," said Jestyn; "but I am ready."

And they fell to.

Jestyn realised that he had met his match, and perhaps more. He fenced cautiously at first and then,

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growing warm, attacked. His opponent received a scratch, and became dangerous. And then, the sailor, hurrying back with his mate, in his zeal kicked over the lantern, which, however, did not go out.

But in that moment Jestyn glanced at the lantern, and his opponent, watchful, made a deadly thrust. It must have surely run him through, but for one thing—Luned's whistle! The sword point struck it, and glanced off.

"He wears mail," cried the other, furious, "but he shall not escape, by St. Dan!"

With that, he made his steel into a thing of lightning. Jestyn could not follow his passes, directed now, he saw, at his unprotected throat and face. One cut he received, a slight one, on his forehead, but the blood flowed freely. At this the girl darted out from the alley, where the woman and she had remained watching the affair, and with a cry of anguish ran in between them, and at the instant received a wound in the breast. The fencers stopped aghast. The sailor, to add to the fatal confusion, cried aloud, "'Ware watch!"

Too much concerned for the little glee-woman to care for his own fate, Jestyn stooped and caught her in his arms. He saw her orange bodice was already tinged with blood, and looking round despairingly, caught sight of the other two men trying to escape, but brought up by the watch. The sailor

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and his mate having blown out the lantern, successfully made their escape. The mother of the hurt girl, who had held aloof till now, ran forward.

"It was cock's feather did it!" she cried to the watch, pointing with malignant finger at Jestyn.

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CHAPTER XXIX

A SAD REFRAIN

THAT night Jestyn and his late fellow-combatant passed in a dirty cell of the common town prison.

They were quite unable to sleep. The place was hideous, verminous. The young sieur from Pembroke sulked for a while, but at midnight he sprang up from his couch, crying aloud,—

"*Holà! les puces!*"

Whereat Jestyn could not refrain from laughing. This cleared the atmosphere.

"What can we do?" said the young man of Pembroke. "We cannot stand this. We must break prison."

"There is no light."

"We must feel—use our swords for feelers!" So saying, he began cautiously to trace the walls with his sword.

He had not completed more than half the circuit when he paused.

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"Do you really wear a steel vest?" he asked Jestyn.

"No."

"What turned that long lunge of mine?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Well, a silver pipe, a flageolet, that was strung round my neck."

"You can play upon it?"

"Only three or four notes."

"I see: it is a charm perhaps, a love-token? If it has saved you once, it may save you again. Let us hear the four notes! It may bring a light at least. . . . Ugh! I cannot bear to think of that girl. Did you hear that song she sang in the street, 'To the damsels, to the damsels?' It witched me completely. Cannot you catch the tune of it?"

"No, and yes! I cannot play it, because I can only play four notes. I did hear it. Ah, would I could hear it again! You did wrong to snare such a wild bird."

The young man laughed uneasily.

"Why did you interfere?" he asked.

For reply, Jestyn drew out his pipe and ran his fingers along it. There was a deep dent on one side, enough to constrict but not close its silver tube. To his surprise, he found it much easier to produce the notes than before. After some futile efforts, he captured Rhosser's signal.

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"Good," said the other. "If you can whistle that, you can do the other too:—'To the damsels, to the damsels!' Try it over."

And so Jestyn began, and after some failures, caught the refrain of the ballad of the Mad Queen.

"There is some devilish property about that thing," said the young man of Pembroke: "it makes me shudder. I see the girl. How her eyes stared up at me as they carried her off. . . . 'To the damsels, to the damsels!' I would not mind if she had not such rare eyes."

"Rare eyes, rarer voice!" said Jestyn. "That one plaintive note she had did not come from earth. It was like the one most magic sad note with which the nightingale in the Vale of Morganwg ends his song. 'Said the Queen, the Quë-ë-en!'"

"Such things have been too much for men," said the other, changing his tone to an almost petulant one. "Your pipe has spoilt her music!"

"How that, sire?"

"Save for that, I should have surely run you through. Would that I had! It was then she came between our swords. It was a splendid thrust I made that she took. If you have no coat of mail under your tunic it would have done for you."

"Then you admit it was you delivered the stroke?"

"No one but I and my master know the trick of it. A master-cut! A pity she spoilt it. Now

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we may both pay for it. But I'll appeal to my lord Pembroke: he will pay. But it is very unlucky —we shall miss the hanging of the three thieves. '*To the damsels, to the damsels!*'—I'm sorry I meddled with that evil song. Confound it! Play it once again."

Jestyn played it over thrice, each time more loudly.

At the third time there came a step at the door. A key turned, the door opened. A light appeared, and a gaoler, who had the air of a man whose legs moved independently of himself, shuffled into the cell. His voice was of the husky, gentle kind, its note deprecatory, and, like his legs, its activity was shown by all manner of unnecessary signs. His speech was full of grunts and confidential particles.

"Ha, ha! young lords that you are, which of you is called Cantington? I have news for you, fair sirs. For I said, so I did, to Master Figet,—I said,—Eli the 'pothecary is like me—not like our good Master Iago. *Na, nagos wir*: not like our good Master Iago,—lum, lum;—but, as I tell you, gentlemen, and if you be fined or hanged, you will like to know, and as I said—it was not the 'pothecary's fault: the poor girl was left within his shop in Lammas Steet, and when he came home, poor Eli was under the wine. 'Twas but a drop—*dropyn back*—in honour of the thief-hanging in the morning—*ië, ië!*"

"But what then?" said Jestyn, starting up.

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"What does he say? I cannot make out the wretch!" said the young man whose name was Cantington.

"Now, now, gentlemen! now, now, now! There, as I say, was the maid, a-bleeding as quietly as going to sleep, and making no moan at all about it. And Master Eli, when he was come into the place, he says to Master Figet—'Gormod o waed! Gormod o waed!' yes, too much blood. So, ha, ha, three horse-doctors to one cow!—he be-be-bled her again in the arm. Then, when he took the basin away, the maid began to sing very soft, in her breath, 'To the damsels, to the damsels.' 'What damsels are those?' hiccoughed Master Eli, and he put his ear to hear what her lips would say. But the wine was in him, poor man, and he could hear no more—*dim 'waneg!*"

"What do you mean, man?" cried Jestyn.

"Do not speak so hot and high, save you would make me eat my tongue. Sirs, if the maid had no more blood, what could she do? How could she answer him? The maid had no answer, had she, if she was dead? The maid was gone, gone to the damsels! It was the holy damsels, I hope and trust?"

"What does he say?" asked the young man of Pembroke.

"That we are murderers!" said Jestyn. "The little glee-woman is dead."

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CHAPTER XXX

THE SHEPHERDS' FEAST

IT was a week or more after the going away of Jestyn when the almanack brought round to Rhôs again the Michaelmas feast ("Hen wyl Mihangel"), and a gloomy, unkind October day it was when it came. On this day, it was the custom in Elfed to bring down the sheep from the hills for the winter; and the night of this pasture-changing was always kept as a feast for shepherds. To-day, the wind blew down from the north-east, as if it might even attempt snow; but all that fell, and that at rare intervals, was a sparse, hard rain. The uninterrupted piteous bleating of the sheep in the dividing folds, and all about the neighbouring fields, and in the very yards and paddocks about the house, was something to remember. It was caught and echoed by the oaks, which caught the wind too in a sort of bleating and moaning of its own. Sheep, barking curs, shouting men, and blowing, crying wind, made a medley of noises like nothing heard on harp or fiddle. But it was music to the Master of Rhôs

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and it was music to the Maid of Rhôs, as she rode Gringolet by his side, to watch the shepherds as they came driving in the flocks about noon.

Luned's hair was dressed in a close crimson hood, with miniver at its borders. Luned's gown was dark crimson. Triple bells of bronze and silver hung from each corner of Gringolet's red-and-black riding-pad. The keen north-east brought the crimson to Luned's cheeks. Luned's eyes shone and danced under her auburn brows. Luned's lips parted with a smile, now at the wantonness of the wind, that teased her gown and Gringolet's silver-threaded red mane, now at the infectious spirits of Rhosser. And for page, Luned was attended by Perrot, who, after untold troubles, had found his way back to Rhôs two days ago, and ran afoot beside her now.

Rhosser was mounted on a nimble mountain pony, smaller than Gringolet, too small indeed for one of his stature, but convenient for sheep-folding. To see him like this was to feel what the return of the old untroubled order of things to Rhôs might mean.

So thought Luned and her mother as they watched him ride to and fro among his men, no sign to-day of past ailments upon his face. To Luned, it was like a recall of the childish delights, frightened away by Howel Farf.

Live then, Rhosser, if you can, as now you ride, astride your sturdy mountain *merlen*, among the mountain sheep! Under your arm is the old well-

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thumbed "Llyfr defaid,"—the book of the names of shepherds and the ear-marks of their sheep, all written in fine characters set forth upon sheepskin, and bound in calf with the brown hair still upon it. To Luned, there is a kind of wisdom in that book which she covets; for she longs secretly to be as ready in all the affairs of Rhôs, field and fold, as a boy might be; and still she longs for nothing so much as the glance of Rhosser, bidding her ride, or come and go, on the errands of the sheep-folding.

But who is this messenger who comes riding a hard-used mule? It is Twm, the market-runner, who comes from Caermarthen, carrying the week's letters and packets and scandals, and who has, as usual, delayed long on the way at Nansi's. He declares a package for my young lady, and a letter for the master. The package is handed to Luned. Hard, square, rattling, mysterious: what can it be? It interests her too much for her not to question it; and she leaves the sheep-folds, and rides off cantering to the house with it, on a nod from Rhosser. But the letter: where is the letter? The messenger turns red. He looks in his pouch; in his mule-pack; feels in his three wallets and the folds of his calf-skin tunic. He must have delivered it in error at Nansi's.

"Who is it from?" asked Rhosser.

"Ieuan the silversmith, in the watergate."

"Well and good!" said Rhosser: "get it, and

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bring it before supper-time to Rhôs-nant, or hang on the thief's oak! Hey, Twm!"

Twm was not too ale-ripe to understand. He rode off again, all in a hurly-burly to get out of Rhosser's reach.

Luned's delight at her package, on the other hand, was overflowing. She had walked Gringolet into the hall, as she often did. He stood, champing and bowing his head, beside the settle, while she knelt there to get a light from the hearth as she unpacked her parcel. When she opened the leathern case, and disclosed the ivory chess-men, and set them in two rows along the oaken seat, Gringolet put his nose to them, and deliberately upset the red bishop by way of compliment.

"Child, child," said Lowry, coming down the stair into hall, "I have told you the hall is no place for horses. But what have you? Now, what have you—name of fortune?"

Luned showed the chess with rapture.

"What a pity," said Lowry—"what a pity Jestyn is not at Rhôs to play at the chess to-night, or to see the sheep brought in and taste the shepherds' pie at supper! He has never seen our Michaelmas feast, and the dancing in hall."

"Perhaps," said Luned; "he is happier where he is, teaching his sword to dance!"

"You little deceiver!" said Lowry mischievously, "there are two thoughts about that! I heard you

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sigh heavily enough by this very chimney-spur last night."

This was a kind of allusion which Luned was obliged to hear often since Jestyn went.

"I sighed for my little pipe!" she said. (In truth, she did miss it sadly.) "The harper invented a most joyous melody before he went with the Archdeacon to Llanfair, and I wanted to try it too. Oh, but it was *pert*.*"

"Well," said Lowry, "the harper promised to come again to-night. He shall harp it in hall, for us all to hear. In truth, merrier harping than his I never wish to hear. And the Archdeacon would make a monk of him, and let him only dole us out sick tunes."

The latter part of this speech was to prove even truer than Lowry knew. But she had surely gauged the two guests whom Jestyn had encountered on their way to Rhôs and who went on later to Llanfair.

Lowry limped off now to her housekeeping, baking, and what not, which had turned the hall of Rhôs to the kitchen's account for the nonce; happy in her house, and not too indignant even at Gringolet's invasion of its threshold.

* * * * *

At nightfall the tables were set and spread, their chief dish, a red wether, roasted whole. But many viands smoked upon them. Flat cakes of *bara-haidd*

* Pretty, taking.

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(barley-bread), and curled oat-cakes, and whiter rolls of wheaten bread were stacked in piles; and flagons of ale and mead and cider flanked the platters. But Euryn had not arrived at dusk, and that was rather disappointing. They had to fall back on a crowther* to fiddle for them instead.

Into this heartening scene they flocked—a score or more—the herds, farm-men, and boys; and a sprinkling with them of such rascals as Rhosser was always ready to harbour at Rhôs. The shepherds chattered like sparrows as they ate and drank.

After supper, the silver horn was filled with hot spiced mead, mixed with red wine and aqua-vitæ and the yolks of a score of eggs, and then silence fell, as it was lifted by Rhosser, standing at the head of the table.

"*Iechyd da!*" (good health!) he cried then—"good health to the men of the sheep, and to the men of the plough, and to the guests of the blessed little Michael, and then we will have the sword-dancing, and then we will have the harp-playing, and then we will have the part-singing; and then we will have the metheglin—and then—then more metheglin!"

The reply to this was a loud "Hi, hi, harroo!" as all stood up.

The sound of it had hardly died away when a noise was heard without. Dan, the door-keeper, came in hastily to say that "there was gentries with-

* Fiddler.

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out"—two or three of them—"great gentries!" he whispered.

When the three entered, the foremost was a tall man, who walked in with the assured, easy courtesy of the recognised great personage. He was wearing a long green, richly furred surcoat over a steel vest, and his shield and a long Norman sword were borne by two stout fellows, in leather and steel, who attended him.

Rhosser stepped down from his seat in his leonine way, and with robust gestures and cries of "*Croesau!*" (welcome) received the three.

"Who is here?" whispered Lowry to Luned, as they rose to give their greeting.

Luned bent her head to hide her face. "The gentleman of Kemes!"

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CHAPTER XXXI

A GAME OF CHESS

THUS, instead of Euryn,—whose too tender glances at Luned, during his late visit here, had made the little cleric speed him this morning to the White Abbey,—came a guest stately and silent,—a guest who was no gain.

The shepherds' feast, it is certain, did not proceed so joyously after the coming of the gentleman of Kemes. His presence fell like a vague shadow upon the drolleries and gaieties of the shepherds. They did not beat a tattoo on the leathern bottles with the bones of the red-wether, or chatter and carol and laugh so fast. And yet the knight did his best. He nodded his head in time to the music, cheering the singing of the song of the "Blessed Little Michael," and kept crying, "*Da iawn!*" (very good) to everything. But in all it was to be seen he knew very little Welsh. While he still sat on Rhosser's right, he addressed himself mainly across the table to Luned, and invariably in the courtly Norman patois that held on both sides the Channel.

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And indeed the maid was the only one to understand him aright; for Rhosser and Lowry knew little more of the Norman than they did of the new west-country English spoken by the Bristol pedlars and others who came so far afield.

The songs and dances ended, and the shepherds dispersing, as the night too drew to a close, Sir Philip took his opportunity and followed Luned to the chimney-spur, where she was teasing the shaggy hounds, Bran and Abran.

"And so, young Sir Ivor," he said lightly, "and so, sweet demoiselle, you have left all your adventuring. Yet I would it were mine to ride by you on a longer journey than was ours; for a braver in a *mêlée* and a gentler squire on the road, I have not seen. And I pray you now," and his voice became soft, "you will take this ring as a token of my former friendship and gentle remembrance, and of the love I bear to you." And he tendered her a slender gold ring with a marvellous twinkling sapphire in it.

To which Luned, astonished and utterly confounded, knew not how to reply, but turned the ring over curiously in her palm, and looked to see if Rhosser and Lowry were not near to aid her in her refusal. But Rhosser was at the gate bidding the shepherds safe speed; and Lowry was on the stair. The only one to come to her succour was Perrot, whereat Luned, blushing in every feature, and returning the ring to him, said,—

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"My lord will pardon me this night, but it is the night of the blessed little Michael, and I am sorry, in truth, that the ring is intended for Sir Ivor, for Sir Ivor died long ago, as his squire, that is here, Master Perrot Prys, will tell you."

"But no," said Sir Philip, smiling doubtfully at Perrot; "it is time, I think, such small squires went to their bed."

"You say true," said she; "for it is Perrot who must light me each night to my chamber."

With that, curtseying low, she took Perrot's hand and ascended the stair.

"Why did you not take the ring?" asked Perrot at the door of her chamber.

"Because my ring-finger will not hold two."

"But there is no ring on your ring-finger."

"Well, then, because the ring had a blue stone in it."

"In truth, was that why?"

"*No!*"

And her door closed.

Perrot had not gone many paces when the door softly opened again, and Luned called him back.

"Perrot," she said, "I have left my chess-men on the table in the inner chamber. I want to take them to bed with me. Go you, and get them for me."

Perrot ran off, delighted to be made use of upon any errand of hers.

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He did not come back for some little while. When he came, he looked solemn and evasive; and alas! he had not got the chess-men.

"You cannot have your pretty chess-men," he said; "they play at the chess."

"What? the chess-men themselves? Then are they fairies, like the chess-men of Peredur."

"No, no, Rhosser plays with the gentleman of Kemes. I think they play for stakes too."

"What stakes?"

"Perhaps for the pretty chess-men," he said evasively.

"The chess-men are mine."

"Well, then—I think—I think they play for the pretty mistress of the chess-men."

"Why should you come to tell me of such a riddle?"

"I only tell what I have heard."

"What heard you then?"

"Heard Rhosser say, 'Well, wager all the warrants you hold against Rhôs, from my lord of Pembroke and him of Kemes, and two thousand crowns besides, against the hand of the Maid of Rhôs. If you win, my daughter, Luned is yours when you come again and leave Jestyn safe in France; but that shall not be till the second year's feast of St. Michael!'"

"What said he to that?"

"Said, 'Agreed, Rhosser, agreed!'"

"Oh, Perrot, it is not true! Oh, but if it be true

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I shall die of shame and sorrow," she said. And then she added, "Perrot, steal down again presently, and tell me how the game goes. I shall not yet to my bed."

Presently Perrot stole down, and came back looking preternaturally solemn.

"How now, Perrot?"

"Sir Philip has taken the red knight! I would have seen more; but Rhosser was angry when he saw me, and angrily he bade me begone!"

"Nevertheless, go again, Perrot: go again, presently, and tell me how the game goes."

And so again Perrot went down very stealthily, and came back, pursing his lips and looking more solemn than before.

"Sir Philip hath taken the red bishop. I dared not do more than glance in from the stair; for Rhosser has his face of anger on him."

"Stay no longer, Perrot: this time 'tis I must go see for myself."

But when, after a pause of few moments, that seemed to be of hours, Luned stole lightly to the stair, she felt disturbed at hearing hoofs in the yard, and then a violent knocking at the door. She paused on the stair a moment to see what would follow.

The sleepy porter ushered in our friend, Twm, whose sheepskin frock dripped wet as he walked across the hall. Wherever he had parted with his

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letter before, he had it safe now. He was taken in to Rhosser.

Rhosser sat at the chess, his face clouded and morose. The game stood critically. Knight and bishop were gone; his queen was in danger. Another move and he might save himself or put his queen in check. He looked up at the interruption.

"Well, Twm," he said, "you have saved your neck. What letter bring ye?"

Twm handed him the letter. It was brief. Rhosser read it out in Welsh, and made no bones about it. The silversmith was sorry he could not be of service to the Master of Rhôs, and sorry to tell him his young kinsman Jestyn was imprisoned on a charge of brawling and causing the death of a wandering glee-woman.

"Jestyn?" said Sir Philip. "Jestyn in prison?" He had understood thus much. He added fervently in French, "Bien! Qu'il y reste!"

"The silversmith—the silversmith——" stammered Rhosser; and then deliberately upsetting the chess-board: "Master Philip, the game is yours; yours, if you will but let me have within two days the two thousand crowns you hazarded but now."

"Two thousand!" said Sir Philip; "it is done."

There was a sound on the turret-stair.

"What was that?" asked Rhosser.

It was Luned, who had slipped on the stone steps. But for Perrot, who had caught her gown, she might

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have fallen to the foot of the stairway. He held her up and seized her hands, and led her back to her bedroom.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"Leave me," she said to him. "Jestyn is in prison. I wish to be miserable."

And Luned fell a-weeping; and the thought of Rhôs about her was no longer able to comfort her.

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CHAPTER XXXII

JESTYN'S FATE

NEXT morning when Sir Philip was ready to leave, and wished to pay his devoirs to the Maid of Rhôs before he started, she was not to be found. Nor was Perrot. Nor was Gringolet in his stall. And so, the gentleman of Kemes had to ride away, very much to his disappointment, without bidding farewell to her whom he had gained at one desperate bid, and hoped to make his wife when next he came to Rhôs.

However, he had not ridden a couple of miles on his way when, on a slant of the hill, looking towards Conwil, he saw the two runaways riding towards him. As they drew nearer he saw that Perrot's pony was all a-steam ; and as for Gringolet, his delicate Arab head hung and his long tail drooped as it never did save when he was tired.

"You have ridden far, I perceive," said Sir Philip : "ridden far, so early in the day?"

"As far as Conwil," said Luned, looking away as she spoke.

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"Wherefore to Conwil, and so early?"

"We followed Twm, the messenger, to hear further news than that he left last night."

"News of young Master Jestyn?"

"Yes, of Jestyn."

"I am afraid Master Jestyn is in the county prison, and cannot to France with me."

"My lord can save Jestyn perchance?"

"H'm—perchance! It depends on his crime. What if it is street-bawling, and the killing of a—glee-woman?"

"It was not he indeed, Sir Philip. Twm hath the story, sad and complete. Oh, I pray you use your influence to bring him safe out of his plight." Luned's face was grown eager. She pressed nearer the knight in her eagerness, and Gringolet champed his defiance at the knight's tall charger.

Sir Philip motioned his two body-squires to ride on, and turned his horse about.

"May I pace a furlong homeward with you?"

"If it will help to save Jestyn."

"See!" he said: "here is the ring you declined. It is still yours. Draw off your glove and try it on your white finger. Try it and wear it! 'Tis a slight thing enough—and I will save Jestyn, if crowns may pull him out of the county."

"But oh—and oh and truly," she said, "if it is right to save him, my lord will save him!"

"And if not?"

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The tears came into her eyes. She rode on, and said nothing. Sir Philip again pressed the ring on her.

"I see," said she, "you are one of those who buy and sell?"

"Nay," he said, with a smile, "I am of those who serve for love. Take the ring—its stone is blue as your own eyes. I will save Jestyn for your sake. You shall have lands at Kemes, a castle in Normandy. Rhôs-nant shall be freed from debt. Rhosser of Rhôs,—you remember how I spoke of him in the way to Arberth, little I knew!—shall have the Queen's favour. I go to pay my homage at Bristol to her. I pray you now, take the ring!"

"No," said Luned, pulling up Gringolet; "how can I, when I cannot ever marry you?"

She looked at him with a look bold and piteous.

The knight drew up his horse too.

"Then you do not care to save Jestyn?"

"Not at Jestyn's expense."

"Then you are decided to marry him?"

"No, in truth, sire!"

"Then you will take this ring?"

"No."

"Why so?"

"I will never marry anybody; but I will never, *never* marry you!"

The knight remained as polite as ever.

"I will come again in two years, to hear you pipe

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on your little pipe as you used. But you do not wear it now?"

She shook her head.

"If you will not take my ring, give me a glove to wear in France and spirit my sword when I fight."

"Indeed," said she, "I will give you nothing."

"Nothing?" he said with a smile. "You are cruel. If Jestyn dies——"

"If Jestyn dies, I will——"

"You will forget him before St. Michael comes again!"

"Never! If he dies I will never marry!"

"Good-bye, sweet lady; you will make me a spirited wife one day!"

"Never, Sir Philip, and if anything happens to him!"

"Never, Sir Ivor? In two years——"

"Never!" And pressing Gringolet to a gallop, she sped away, her face burning with anger.

It was a mile nearer home before she drew rein to let Perrot overtake her.

"You did wrong not to treat with him," said Perrot at once. "He is powerful: he can save Jestyn."

"He *will* save Jestyn."

"How is that? You did not receive the ring."

"If anything happens to Jestyn I would never speak to him again, and he knows it! He will save Jestyn, and he will return to Rhôs one day."

"And then?"

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"Then nothing. He can go away again—as he did to-day. See how Gringolet bows his head at the beeches, and churns up the fallen beech-leaves. He always likes to do that when he can. There are so many fresh fallen leaves, it must have been a first frost this morning. Oh, Gringolet, will not Jestyn be saved? He has my little whistle of St. Brieux, and that brings luck."

Gringolet champed, and arched his neck, and bowed his head, turning a bright eye back on his rider.

"Yes, he says yes!" she cried triumphantly.

As they were near the gateway, Perrot shrewdly proposed that they should say nothing of their encounter with the knight. "Your father will rage if he hears."

"I am angry with my father. I shall tell all, if I am asked," she said.

However, as chance would have it, Rhosser was not at hand when they returned, and Lowry, full of misgivings, was glad to content herself with scolding them both as truants.

* * * * *

It was some days before further news of Jestyn reached Rhôs, and then it came in a letter from him.

"To the Demoiselle Luned of Rhôs," it ran. "Sweet Maid, honourable sweet Luned, I write from a hard place, where I must die, or spend a twelvemonth or more for my sins. I am accused of murder.

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I did none. A maid in danger: I did as you bade me, and fought when she cried help. She ran between swords, and took a cruel thrust so. The same night the town apothecary helped her to die. To the Moot Court came Sir Philip, and would willingly be my bond. Wherefore they took it not I know not, else his thousand crowns had saved me many weary days. And now, if you think me shamed, with a black X in the justice's book as one that killed a maid, I pray you forget me. But your pipe I keep, until you appeal against it. It is my friend and my sad comforter in these cold hours, and its music is each day a note or so longer. Rhosser, your father, may think to have me out of bond, but they carry me for security to Pembroke. The dead glee-maiden was of Pembroke town, the which steward or baily may yet choose to have my life. My lord of Pembroke hath paid fine for his kinsman, my fellow-prisoner, Cantington, who is free of this. If this letter reach Rhôs, it is a marvel. Tell thy father, sweet lady, I did all I knew to use persuasion with the silversmith. The chess-men I had from him will give you sport on winter nights. When you play the chess, you may think, too, how your poor knight lies in pawn; but you were best now forget him, who is taken and in this taking is,

"*Yr eiddot, athrist ag anlwkys,**

"JESTYN AP MORGANT."

* Thine, sad and unlucky.

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This letter Luned carried into the hall on its arrival and read it by the firelight, and dropped tears on it, and dried them away, and then wept again. And presently, on Lowry's coming, she told it all over to her, as they sat together on the chimney-spur.

"Now," said Lowry, when she had heard all, "Rhosser is too angry about thy treatment of Sir Philip to do anything for Jestyn; and indeed, child, if he is what they say, he can never return to us. But I'll tell thee, child, what to do."

Whereupon Luned, looking long into the embers, murmured: "What is there to do?"

"Go to Llanfair on the morrow and ask Efa for counsel. This trouble had never come if we had never sent thee to Llanfair in quest of Rhosser, to become Sir Philip's road-fellow on the Arberth road."

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CHAPTER XXXIII

LLANFAIR AGAIN

LUNED rode off early to Llanfair with Perrot (who would not be shaken off) in close attendance. To-morrow was Perrot's last day at Rhôs, and the thought of saying farewell was like a day's death to the youngster. He had got into disgrace at Arberth through his absences, and he was returning to Uchdrud to-morrow.

As they rode on together in the flying wind that morning, "You had a letter?" said Perrot, watching a crow sail down the wind.

"Yes!" said Luned, precisely as the crow cawed. "Yes! If that crow caws again, it is unlucky. He will be lost."

"Is he still at Caermarthen?"

"They are taking him to Pembroke." As she spoke the crow cawed a second time.

"Why does not Rhosser overtake them on the way and carry him off?"

"Caw! Why does yonder crow not caw against the wind? Because he does not want to."

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"But why not?"

"Because . . . Sir Philip!"

"I see," said Perrot, and became silent.

At the gates of Llanfair they parted.

Instead of the ordinary quiet of Llanfair, the courtyard and stables were full of horses, and Luned was seeking a vacant stall when a groom appeared. His face was familiar, though she had not seen it since she parted from Robin Goch on the road to Caermarthen. Robin had the grace to look foolish now when he saw her, and begged her to say nothing in his disfavour to his mistress.

"My lady is a most sweet kind mistress, and we must not put sour things in her head," he said in a husky whisper. "The house is choked with persons (parsons) and men-at-arms to-day; and the friars are getting the best of it. Better show thy beads, noble young mistress, at thy going in, and not look too bold about thee. I hear them at their prayers now."

Luned made her way to the hall, wondering as she went at Rob's communication.

Entering, her ear was caught by the resounding, unmistakable voice of the little cleric as she lifted the tapestry over the door. But she was not prepared for what she saw.

Within the hall were gathered a hundred men and more, irregularly grouped, their heads bared; but many of them displayed spears and rough targes. Among them she recognised some retainers of

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Llanfair and Rhos. But with these leather-tunics she noted a sprinkling of common clerics in brown, and superior clerics in black. Lay and cleric alike, their faces were turned toward the end of the hall, where she had stepped upon the raised floor, and so paused, arrested by the scene before her. The intentness of their gaze singularly affected her. They looked spell-bound. The spell was the Archdeacon's voice, which, full of emotion and power, was concluding a homily extraordinary.

. . . "And now," said he, "I am at an end, heritors of Dynevor and Elfed and Towy strath. Is the region given to you on earth, in trust for your sons, to be to them a region of discord and endless trouble, or a comely mirror of Paradise and an everlasting region of Heaven? For now is our hope of change and our day of deliverance. Now, as you have heard, the Queen is in the west, triumphant, and has set her feet on Bristo'. And now we need but one fit chosen messenger to carry our petitions and win her grace and her young son. Where shall we find such an inspired one,—to hold her, and draw and compel, and tell of our great desires, Church and people at one, full of zeal and love,—an ambassador of Heaven, shining with the grace of God, burning with intense fire?" . . .

It was at this moment that Luned paused, one

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hand still reverted and holding the tapestry through which she had entered, while a gleam of sunlight shone from a window high in the wall, and fell on her head, lighting her ruffled yellow locks, and her face, delicate, cherubic, below them. When the little cleric paused, there was a murmur among those below. He turned then, which he had been too absorbed in his own eloquence to do before, and, like his hearers, was startled and filled with wonder at the apparition. It was like an answer to his question. He would have spoken to Luned, but having recovered herself, she withdrew again through the tapestried door, and was gone.

She heard a shouting in the hall, as she sped along the narrow passage. It sounded like "The Maid of Rhôs, the Maid of Rhôs!"

At the end of the passage, behold the Lady of Llanfair.

"I was in the little gallery," she said, "looking down, and saw you enter. That you should arrive at such a moment! You came like some apparition. Come to my chamber and tell me what fate could have brought you to Llanfair at this hour of all hours."

Luned, when they were seated, produced her letter. When Efa had read it, she said, "Let me show it to Father Alcwyn, that is, the Archdeacon. He knows my lord of Pembroke: he is adroit, he is kind. Wait; I will see how soon he is to be done with

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his spears and targes. At noon they are all to be feasted in hall before they go." And she was gone before Luned could stay her.

When she returned, it was to say: "You have brought strange chances upon you. They are debating now whether an innocent ambassador like you would not be the best to send to the Queen. Your advent was so providential, you looked so like an angel, they take it as an omen, a sign sent from Heaven."

Luned clasped her hands.

"I could not, could not."

"Why not?" said the Lady of Llanfair. "Dear child, dear little ambassador, your doctor Iago taught you to think of stars. Do you not see? If you went, you could appeal to the Queen for Jestyn too, and save him. The Queen, the Queen! she rides plain to me as the pole-star in your heavens. And I will be your fellow-ambassador, if there is no one else. Poor women and maids, it is we who must help to save the land. The men are so full of the wine of earth. They fight, and spend themselves in foreign fields. But this shall be a chosen region, like the Holy Land, free from the hot riot of the world!"

But Luned, puzzled by these new ideas, thought only of Jestyn. "The Queen!" she murmured, "the Queen! I will go see the Queen, if it will save Jestyn, and if you will go with me!"

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CHAPTER XXXIV

THE QUEEN'S CLOSET

THE city of Bristol, whose walls had seen a world of state and tragedy since the coming of Queen Isabella and the fall of the castle and capture of old Hugh Despenser; whose streets had seen my lord Mortimer and Sir John of Hainault in gleaming armour, followed by hundreds of noble knights, ride over stones still wet and red with blood, saw a day or two before the departure of these great people a different train enter its Welsh gate at high noon, October 20th, 1326.

Four men-at-arms mounted on stout ponies, leather-clad, with leather and steel caps, and bearing long spears and brass targes, headed the train. Then came a tall, knightly figure on a tall black horse, greaves and shirt of mail setting off his superb figure under a furred pelisse; then two clerics in black; then two ladies, one in a dark crimson furred riding-gown on a white palfrey; the other, very youthful, in a soft yellow gown, her hair hidden under a gold-threaded white coif, riding a dark ruddy

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chestnut of such graceful form and proudly nodding, tossing head, that boys ran alongside to see it. Two waiting-maids in red petticoats rode behind; and a handful of grooms and retainers brought up the rear.

"What the devil comes here? Welsh Highlanders?" said my lord Mortimer, who had gone to a window for air, and stood there yawning.

He had had a long, tedious interview with three bishops, including him of Hereford, Adam of Orleton that is to say, who had asthma and choked if he had not a great fire in his chamber when the autumn mists were about. Mortimer had been bored by their edifying advices and ecclesiastical rigmarole. He found the street more amusing.

"Why, the rascals have brought ladies with them," he said, still gazing out of window, "lovely as Chrestien's Enid. They must intend an embassage, Messire Jean," he said to the fat, small man who attended him; "if so, I shall like them better than these bishops who wish for further conference. See that it is I who receive the pretty Highlanders after dinner. I relinquish the bishops to the Queen. But only the two pretty dames, Jean,—not the pale cleric that rides with them, and not—oh, not the monster with the red beard."

The little troop of travellers from Rhôs, meanwhile, had reached the wide gateway of the Golden Anchor, where they learnt to their discomfiture that they

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could have a quiet chamber for refreshment now, but no chambers for that night. The ladies dismounted, however, and were glad to be out of the noisy street. Rhosser and the two clerics went off to look for a lodging for the night. The Lady of Llanfair and Luned were escorted to a small chamber overhanging the street, which was full of hubbub.

While they waited, a sound of a drum drew them to the window. Three tumblers in motley, with drum and tabor, and a square of carpet, were setting up in the street. But when their drum had begun its tattoo, and before they could make any way with their antics, two serving men with long gilt staves ran up, crying, "*Quittez, quittez*,—quit, quit!" and with that unceremoniously cudgelled them aside.

Three knights with lances, and enormous red and white plumes on their helms, followed, riding abreast and filling up the roadway. Their horses were sweating. The middle knight's tunic was stained with fresh blood. His face was grey and drawn under his falling plume; but he chatted indifferently to his companions till he came opposite their window, when he glanced that way and started in his saddle. Sir Philip! He made no further sign, but Efa and Luned simultaneously shrank back, with looks that asked what neither could nor cared to answer. They would gladly now have turned from the street, which, like all the streets they had come through, gave them the sense of a city

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which had had its glut of sensation—sensation on the great scale—and had no feeling left for small event. But they feared each other's faces more than the street. The smoky, sulky haze that overhung the houses around was better than the heavy haze of memory, cast by the gentleman of Kemes. They had pictured it very differently on the way to Bristo', talking of the Queen's triumph, not of the King's fall; of great and gay spectacles, not of death. They had not anticipated the terror of the gibbet at the castle gates, and old Sir Hugh's bloody remains stuck up there to affront the day. But indeed, the indefinable odour of death lurked everywhere, among all that fantasy of state and all that nodding pageantry of Hainault, Aubrecicourt and Sars.

They were still at the window when the woman of the inn entered. She came to say that a parcel of knights were ordered to leave for London early in the afternoon, and that two sleeping chambers would thus be left vacant. Efa went to inspect the rooms, while Luned remained alone at the casement, half terrified, half fascinated by the new strange world which the street, and the noises of the town beyond the street, disclosed to her.

She thought now of what Iago had said at Dinas Moryn, of the turmoil and fatal changes at work in the outer world. Was he right? Was Efa right to leave the world for such grey walls as he had spoken

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of? The Queen might save Jestyn. If not——? Father Alcwyn had said it might be days ere the coveted chance could be secured. While turning these things over in her mind, she had all but come to the conclusion that amid the throng of great folk, French, English, and what not, waiting on the court, and the shows of state and victory, there was very little chance of her seeing the Queen at all, when, as if by the sudden pulling of a string, the world seemed to turn completely over under her feet.

It had so fallen out that, unluckily for my lord Mortimer's plans, a giddy waiting-woman of the Queen's, Jacqueline by name, had carried her the news of the mysterious Welsh maiden, a princess of the hills, who rode a wondrous red Arab like a steed in an enchanted tale, and who sought to see the Queen on some romantic errand. Thus it came that the Queen's curiosity was touched, and she appointed also an hour that same afternoon, to receive the dainty deputy that Mortimer had set eyes on. She made inquiries and learnt the party was lodged at the hostelry of the Golden Anchor; learnt too that my lord Mortimer had taken, too promptly, the matter into his own hands. It was easy to checkmate him. The Golden Anchor, though in a different street, was within easy reach of a postern at the rear of the castle, if certain intervening alleys were used as a short cut. In the castle the Queen had her apartments, and thence Jacqueline was despatched with

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a commission to see this Highland maiden. And so, as Luned sat waiting for the Lady of Llanfair to rejoin her, she was startled by the arrival of a black-browed, merry-eyed French waiting-woman, who proceeded gaily but determinedly to insist upon her accompanying her back to the castle.

It was of no use for Luned to protest that she waited the Lady of Llanfair, who was her chaperone.

"Oh, foolish," said the waiting-woman: "you speak French as sweetly amiss as any Breton. If you wait, the Queen will be gone to receive the homage of the bishops. It is the only chance, the only one, by the holy buttons of St. Pierre!"

There was something reassuring in the creature's gaiety.

"Her Majesty," she said, laughing the while, "will be angry if you do not come; and so goes your chance—*comme ça!*"

In the end Luned was overborne, swiftly led out of the hostelry, and before she knew where she was, was being conveyed through a postern into a narrow court, and thence up the narrow stairs of a turret.

She had no time to think, no time to recollect the fine appeal for the three estates of Dyfed and the see of St. David, which Father Alcwyn had so carefully schooled her to repeat. All the way, Jacqueline rattled on with cheerful impudences in her ear; but she only half heard what she said:

"Conceive the impudence of Messire Jean—that is

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my lord Mortimer's tame scribe—to try to interfere with a Queen's woman. How I routed him! He lost his breath at my first attack. M. Jean is so fat. He thought to capture you first. He, he!—but see, here we are. This closet is curtained off the Queen's parlour; here is a chink in the curtain that you can look through. When you hear steps, peep out! If you observe a dark-eyed noble little great lady in a trained gown of green and gold, followed by a small spotted hound, that is the Queen herself. It may be moments, many or few; but she is sure to come hither. Pity you will not see my lord Mortimer too. He is a true *chevalier de dames*. Eyes that devour you—as we say at Rheims. But what am I saying? You will not see his black locks. The Queen will take care of that. But when you see her, run to her, run curtseying, and then fall, throw yourself at her feet; kiss her sandals, kiss the hem of her robe! Do not let her lift you up too soon. Can you shed tears without spoiling your pretty eyes? If you can, do. Then—that goes very well. Your suit is granted. Afraid? Oh, foolish, this is your only chance. To-morrow, early, she leaves Bristo' for Westminster; and then she will be too far from your wild Gaelic hills to care about what goes on there. Here is a little chest to sit upon. Wait, and bethink yourself you are luckier than thousands who would give their eyes to be where you are. Now I go; but I come back for you. You can give me

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what gold pieces you think of giving when the interview is over." And the gay rattle-pate slipped away.

Luned had not long to wait ere she heard a step, and more steps than one, in the chamber, and found herself trembling from head to foot. She stood up softly. In a few moments she had not gained courage enough to peep out through the curtain chink. She heard two voices. One was a very rich persuasive man's voice, the other, a woman's, full of soft tones.

"Nay, now go!—I expect this pretty messenger, Mortimer. Jacqueline has gone to bring her to me. So go."

At this moment, Luned, impelled by her unlucky star, peeped out. What she saw it would be impossible to tell. All she retained was an intense impression of a woman's face, lit by veiled mobile eyes, and a man's, handsome and heavy under black locks. But it was the glance between the two which destroyed Luned's courage. She was terrified at she knew not what. There is a mystery in a maiden's instinct of some things not to be explained by the ordinary intelligence. Luned turned, pursued by overwhelming terrors, from the little closet and into the door of the turret-stair; sped down the stair; reached the court and found a postern into the street.

She sped along it as fast as she dared, but in her blind panic turned the wrong way, and looking for

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the Golden Anchor found herself instead at the door of the Black Falcon; and there unluckily she was pounced upon by three birds of gayer feather. Three knightly gallants, exquisitely attired, they displayed open sleeves of red and purple silk, which they flapped at her, and then closed in upon her. She only escaped by wrenching the sleeve of one and stooping to evade the others. Pale as death, she sped off again, and this time gained the inn.

There she flung herself into Efa's arms, crying, "Save me, hide me!"

"What," said Efa: "you have seen the Queen then!"

"Oh yes, yes! It is no use, no use. I am lost. Jestyn is lost—if I stay in this evil place. Take me back to RHÔS!"

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CHAPTER XXXV

THE SHADOW UPON RHÔS

EARLY next morning when the yawning apprentices were taking down the chandler's and vintner's shutters, while the early candles still twinkled within, a sad troop started out of the narrow street of the Golden Anchor. Gringolet attempted a caracole or so in its midst, but that was to disguise his true feelings. The rest went gravely, not speaking save when a turn to right or left must be taken.

Rhosser rode at the head for a league of the way only. He and the little cleric, and half their party with them, were to remain behind to use what influence they might. Luned's face was hidden in her wimple. She had not been able to sleep, and the whole place about her this morning was like a dream that ought to have been got rid of by night. She kept her eyes on Gringolet's neck. Once only she lifted them. It was when their pace was checked under the castle at a gateway. One glance she gave, her last at the place. Sombre, unfriendly walls, and

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jackdaws flying and scolding at a gibbet: this was all she remembered afterwards.

Two or three miles of the open road beyond, and Rhosser parted with them. He cast a contemptuous glance at Luned. "You can tell your mother how well you have done for Jestyn. But nay, tell her nothing! I will be at Rhôs before you yet. I say no farr'well!"

If the rest of that sad journey was in any one thing memorable, it was in the one pause they made when the two travellers paid a visit to Llandaff, on the morning of St. Iltud. The aged archpriest who preached the sermon (in the Norman tongue he preached), spoke of great changes in the land and in the Church, and besought "you who live to see what I shall not see, to stand fast and labour to build it, and keep it fast and unshaken in the day of the fall of kings!"

This homily had its sounding echo in their hearts and minds. The breath they had caught at Bristol of the distemper of the realm was not one that would exhale itself in a moment and be dissipated on easy airs of time. And Jestyn's fate, for whose discharge nothing had been done, weighed upon them both, and not least, as you shall think, upon Luned. Rhosser too was left behind; and presentiments of the dangers attending him came easily flocking, after the fears for Jestyn, as a flock of starlings will sometimes fly after rooks.

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So the talk of these two women was sad and grey-coloured and uneasy as they rode along the sea-flats and crossed hill and vale. Luned told Efa more of Iago as they crossed at last the sands of Llwchwr. The salt tides reminded her of Dinas Moryn, and of Iago's starry fatalism. Efa said the world was full of envy and misery, and love mis-spent; and the only refuge for unhappy women was in the white quiet of the Church. On Dinas Moryn, said Luned, if there were a cloister there, one might forget the world. Better, said Efa, be at peace there, than be a Queen. But then she said again, as they bid the sea good-bye, and turned their backs on the sea-wind blowing in clouds the sands of Llwchwr, "But no, love is for some in the sea; for others on the land. There is a garden where love is, over whose blooms no salt sands can blow to kill them and hide them away."

* * * * *

Within three days of their return home the little cleric reappeared at Llanfair. Confessedly dispirited, yet was he not beaten. Rhosser, he said, had been persuaded still to linger, for some reason unknown.

"In truth," said the little cleric, "they say Rhosser is in heavy default in the county court both at Pembroke and Caermarthen, for his detention of the cattle of Kemes and others of Bishop David. He is like to lose Rhôs if he is not well provided with pence. I fear he means to absent himself, and

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perchance ship himself abroad with these men of Hainault."

The little cleric left for Pembroke next day, and vowed to do what he could for Jestyn. The Lady of Llanfair, anxious for her friends at Rhôs, and hearing that a party of horsemen had passed Nansi's house of call during the night and galloped up the steep road to Rhôs, set off thither on horseback, attended by Rob the Red, intent on offering herself as surety in one way or another.

What was her surprise, on arriving in the hall there, to see a tall man seated at the end of the table conning a book. Surely it was Rhosser? Rhosser it proved to be. Whatever his reasons had been for delay, here he was, safe returned.

"I am sick of gibbets and red steel!" he said. "I'll farm sheep and breed little horses that shall make all Dyfed envious, and bring gold again to Rhôs. As for Howel Farf, *his* head will do me no harm. I talked with it the other night, and promised to find the body for it before the year's out. Since then I have slept sound. . . . Did you see the little cleric? Ha, ha! I gave the little cleric the slip. He is too holy for this eating and drinking world. He is not a man, he is a voice. I got tired of his voice. A trumpet all day is too much. He wanted me to buy a missal at Bristo'; a very fine one, with gold pictures no bigger than your thumb-nail in it, done by the brothers at Tourraine. I told

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him I had a missal at home. This is my missal." And he turned over the well-thumbed leaves of his hairy book, containing the names of sheep-farmers and ear-marks of sheep in Elfed.

"But Jestyn?" said Efa: "we must not leave Jestyn to lie at Pembroke. Where is the little maid, and what does she say?"

"Luned has a sore head," said Lowry severely; "she has had one ever since she came back from the Bristo' journey. Of all mad dogs, the maddest must have bit you all to take you to see that fine English Queen who, it seems, is so ignorant, she cannot speak a word of Welsh."

"Now, now," said Rhosser; "if the little maid is ill, it is her heart is sore, not her head. Her fever is Jestyn; but that is a fever can be cured."

"How is that?"

"The little cleric has letters to my lord of Pembroke, and to Pembroke he is gone by this. Go up to the maid's chamber, and tell her all will yet be well."

The two women went off together to Luned's chamber, carrying some posset.

She started up, looking at them with bright eyes and a poppy-red spot in her cheeks. They looked concerned, exchanging glances.

"I know," she said, almost leaping out of bed, "I know why you look so. You have come to tell me they have hurt him, like old Sir Hugh at Bristol! He

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is dead, because I was afraid—afraid to beg his life, poor thing. I used to call him a coward. But the Queen—it was she frightened me. And Jestyn was not afraid; he fought because I told him. Will you bring me his pretty chess-men? When was it? Was it yesterday? Already it is a long time ago. And when—when my head does not ache so—you will have Gringolet out to walk on the grass beneath the window, and I will get up and speak to him."

This was the beginning of a long illness. It was within a sen'night of St. Thomas before Luned was equal to being carried downstairs by Rhosser; and she was still so weak then that when Gringolet was brought into hall, and whinnied and laid his head on her shoulder, she nearly fell where she stood.

"I shall never ride him again!" she said, and took to sobbing in the most heart-rending fashion.

"And now," said Rhosser, "if you will be stopping that maid's folly, I have news for you that Malen got for us."

She looked at him.

"Jestyn escaped from Pembroke two nights ago, and is said to have gone to France. But they are hunting him up and down like the Twrch Trwyth.* Very like they will come here after him."

"Escaped?" she said; "but to France? That is the other end of the world. Where is Malen? I

* The mythical boar hunted by King Arthur.

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must hear it for myself. Will they ever let him come back to his own?"

"If he is wise as he was, he will not wait for that. But I will go see Malen." And Rhosser strode off to the yard.

He came back in a few moments saying she was gone. "Another hare hunt!" he added. "I told the poor wretch not to go, and we could hide her in the roof here; but she was afraid the sheriff's men would harry us. Sure and certain, Mali had to do with Jestyn's getting away—without a doubt on it."

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CHAPTER XXXVI

GRINGOLET IN DANGER

SO the year wore sadly on to its close, and all the while Rhôs felt the shadow grow between it and the sun. Luned did not revive, but paled and moped; and Gringolet was left uncared for. He grew wild in his paddock, and even broke bounds now and again, and was hardly to be brought in again.

"He misses my whistle!" said Luned; "he would always come when I whistled."

"They have been giving him corn on the sly, the rascals," said Rhosser. "What did the gypsy say? 'Let him eat air or earth or water! but give him no corn. Corn is fire in the belly of an Arab.' I must take to looking after Gringolet and riding him myself."

"Oh no!" said Luned, "you are too heavy. You will break his back."

"I am going to sell Black Lion,—which I got back after Jestyn's mishap,—at the next horse-fair,"

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said Rhosser. "Then I shall have to ride Gringolet; or, would you rather he were sold instead?"

In truth, Rhosser's affairs, though he had worked with great zeal since his visit to Bristol, were going from worse to worse. Already he had sold a couple of thousand sheep, including a number of the ewes that ought to have been kept.

Failing some grace of fortune, Rhôs and its lands might be gone before another year ran. The Lady of Llanfair had offered help; but Rhosser was too proud. Moreover, the little cleric felt that if the money she had promised for a new sisterhood were lent to Rhosser, their house would never be built. So he prudently hinted to Rhosser that very good security would have to be given if the money were in any way devised to him. This would have been quite enough to rouse Rhosser's pride if he had been hesitating; which, to do him justice, he was not.

One December morning, when the smoke clung like a heavy robe about the house, Rhosser got out his black horse in hot haste. He had had a message bidding him to Llandeilo on matters of urgency. When he had been two hours gone a party of five people appeared in the courtyard of Rhôs. One was a lawyer and one was a sheriff's officer. He carried a bit of chalk in his hand, and, taking stock, put crosses everywhere—upon doors and pens, noting all the horses, cattle, sheep, in the place.

Luned had been sitting moodily by the fire, cutting

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and trimming afresh an old winter pelisse. She did not seem to care what happened. When Lowry talked of the lawyer, and his unctuous voice, and the sheriff's officer, like a jackdaw for inquisitiveness, Luned did not heed apparently.

But when they had returned to the yard, and their steps struck sharp on the cobbles, she rose from the hearth and went to the yard-door. The lawyer, in a black robe and square cap, was pointing the sheriff's Jack to one of the stables. Now, within a loose stall in the next stable was Gringolet.

"Where are the hounds, Bran and Abran?" asked Luned.

"Why?" said Lowry.

"No matter: where are they?"

"Your father locked them up in the kennel. Some dog has been sheep-worrying: he thought it might be Abran."

Luned went to the key-hooks in the chimney and took the kennel-key. Then she took a leash and stole swiftly across to the kennel. When the lawyer and his fellows came to Gringolet's stable-door there she was, two huge hounds in hand, confronting them, her lip trembling, but very determined.

"Hi! What is here?" said the Jack, jumping back. "I'se warrant there's a famous little hackney in here."

"Yes," said Luned, "and two hounds."

"Oh, young lady——"

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"We must enter, young lady!" said the lawyer with much unction. "Go on, good Teitpol!"

Teitpol made one step forward. The leash slackened, the hounds reared, and muttered dogs' curses. Teitpol slipped and sprawled headlong. The lawyer fled across the stable-yard.

And so Gringolet was spared, for that occasion at least. But Luned never let him out of her sight and hearing for the rest of that day. And when towards dusk the discomfited bailiffs left the place, she was still too full of their evil dispositions to trust him alone in his stable. So she came, leading Gringolet, into hall, and tethered him to a ring under the great rack of spears and bows, and gave him barley cake to eat. And for once Lowry had not a reproach to utter.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BLACK HARE

THAT night of St. Thomas, came one of the wickedest winds to Rhôs which had been known within living memory. It came out of the south-east, but at times it appeared to blow from every quarter at once. It was heard miles away before it was felt, by one of the shepherds, who had also seen his ewes turning their tails to the south'ard—a very bad sign. The wind rose as the sun set, going down with an angry red, amid ugly and foul-coloured clouds. As dark fell, it had increased to a fury. The rushing and screaming, and moaning and tumbling of its strong breakers of air amid the trees and stone walls were begot, one felt, of rage ; meant deliberately to carry havoc, destruction, and death.

An hour after dark, Lowry and Luned sat within the hearth, listening to the unholy riot in the chimney. Rhosser had not come back. Their uneasiness on his account was given a voice to cry out a new terror with every moment.

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Now, it appeared, a fateful hand was knocking at the doors. Now, the wind was at a lull, and in the interval they heard it ramping, miles away in the highlands, after it had swept by Rhôs. Now they heard a frightful blast, breaking over the trees, like an overwhelming sea, before, with a monstrous crash, it was upon the roof and walls of the house.

"Who is that knocking at the door? Go see!" said Lowry to one of the maids.

She went, and recoiled at the doorway, pale as death, crying out.

"Fool!" said Lowry, angry at anything that made for more sensation, "what is it?"

"I saw the master, holding a black hare by the ears!"

"How could you see, Hannah fach, when you did not open the doors?"

"They were open when I went," said Hannah, whimpering.

"Paf!" said Lowry, and limped to the great doors herself, calling to one of the men, who had been prolonging his supper at the end of the long table, to help her open them.

But when they opened, not a sign was to be seen of any one.

Perhaps it was an hour after this, perhaps more, when the wind suddenly lulled. The quiet then was almost as terrifying as the storm had been; for

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the sky cleared, and a moon of steel shone out of a sky as blue as a summer day. So, at least, Luned thought, as she and Elias led Gringolet across the yard to his stall. This lull lasted over an hour. Then the storm began again. It had taken breath, and came again, with new allies, new furies. Thunder, lightning, hail and rain, came with it. Luned was about going to bed, a tall taper in hand; but when she had opened the door into the stair, the wind rushed down it in a black waft that douted her taper and slammed the door to against her.

Thereafter all idea of bed was given up. Lowry called maids and men about the hearth, and said they would toast collops and make ready some hot, spiced ale for present comfort and against Rhosser's return. In truth, she did this to keep their thoughts from the terror of the black wind, and from fancying dark things were at their backs.

Round the fire they fell to talking of the *Ceffyl Ysprydol*, the ghostly horse, and of that other evil beast, the *march Malen*, or Malen's stallion of flaming nostrils, upon which she rode the winds. Indeed, it was strange how first Howel Farf and then Malen kept returning to their talk.

"Say not she was no witch," said Elias, "or she will be here, flying in a moment, to show her crafts. Indeed, *Mali's* a witch, and a black witch. She wiled those bloody hounds of Master Howel Farf's away. She was a hare then. But where led she them?

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Over the red crags of the Ban mountain—Yes, well, I know it. Hark ye! what was that?"

"Nothing, man, nothing," said Lowry. "How do you know it?"

"Because," said Elias, in an unctuous whisper, "their black bodies were seen by the Ban shepherds floating in the Llyn-y-Fan-fach. The eels have eaten them by this."

"Ah!" said an old shepherd, "the Llyn-y-Fan eels are very good eating, yes, sure. There's a fat wether falls over crag into water, often enough there is; and the eels live like the gentries."

The storm abated nothing. The collops had been eaten. A fresh flagon of ale was cast into the crock, with due infusion of spices, when the most demoniac yell resounded in the chimney that had yet been heard, and a clot of hairy mortar and an old jack-daw's nest fell down the chimney into the brew. It sent a plump of ale hissing and seething in the fire, and caused a hasty scattering of those who sat farthest within the hearth, feet against the embers.

Maid and man had barely swallowed their "diawls" and other expletives on this—which they took as a certain warning of worse to come—when there came a knocking at the door. Lest any should mistake, it was followed by one long scream, like some creature in its death-pangs.

Lowry herself rose and went to the door. Elias went with her. He lifted the latch, when the wind

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flung both doors wide open. There stood Rhosser, a bundle in his arms, dripping with the rain. His eyes were dilated as with terror; but he strode into the midst of the hall, where the hearth-gleam fell bright, and there he laid his burden softly down on the rushes. It was Malen, or Malen's body; for when they tried to restore the poor old creature they failed. By Rhosser's account, he found her struck down by the torn-off huge arm of an elm that lay across her. No doubt it had broken her back.

"Did she say nought, Rhosser, when you found her?" asked Lowry.

"Said little. 'Tell you,' she said, 'tell the Maid of Rhôs—Malen has seen him—Jestyn.' That was all. The wind howled away what else she would have said."

"Ah, poor soul!" said Lowry. "What are we to do with her?"

Any thought, indeed, of keeping the body within the house was out of the question, for the maids fell into screams of terror at the idea. At last, Rhosser settled it.

"Come, men," he said, "the wind is down and the rain is done. We will have her out to her own hut, poor old mommet. It is what she would have wished. There we will wake her like any holy old wife who had the priest at her pillow."

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE PLYGAIN

THE Christmas feast followed St. Thomas with a heavy fall of snow, that hid Malen's grave at the bottom of the oak-wood beneath a drift that lasted for weeks. A sad night for the house of Rhôs. What hope remained to them now of saving it? Rhosser had exhausted every chance during the late weeks. March and Ladyday must end the havoc begun by Howel Farf last May. Howel was dead; his mischief lived.

Rhosser had laughed at the rout of Lawyer Fox and Teitpol. "But," said he, "Master Fox has us. His white chalk is as good as the King's green wax. We are safe now over Plough Monday. After that, if nought comes—and how can it come?—all must go, sheep and cattle, hound and horse."

Luned looked at him. "But not Gringolet?" she said, thinking of Lawyer Fox.

"Gringolet, too."

So there was dancing and little gaiety in hall that night. But they kept up the famous old custom of

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sitting up and practising the carols, and making the honey-balls and candy-plums, to be discussed at the Plygain. For no maid would think her hopes of a true love, or of Heaven, secure, if she did not eat sweet apples and candy between the carols at the Plygain.

The night wore on, and they piled the hearth with the logs and forest wreckage wrought by the late gale. The men played knuckle-bones and chequers at the table, or fell to fencing. The maids tittered over the candy-pan, or broke with wild wailing voices into a carol-stave :—

"To the cow-shed, come, ye shepherds,
By the candle-light.
See, a King within a cradle,
Born this winter night.
See, the burly oxen bowing,
In the straw beside;
And the mother maid a-weeping.

Then very softly :—

When she sees her babe a-sleeping
She turns away,
She turns away,
Her tender tears to hide!"

When it was still early hours, Rhosser, who had been stretched along the chimney-spur, started up, and went yawning across to the doors, and looked out at the night.

"Oh, *mae hi n'oer!* 'tis cold, 'tis very cold!" he said; "but the stars are making round! 'Tis time,

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my men, ye went to look to what horses will best carry ye through the snow-drift to the Plygain."

The horn lanterns began, thereupon, to flit betwixt hall and stables, and the maids went up to the maids' chamber with a taper to look out their ribbons, and to help attire their pretty mistress in a furred crimson surcoat and a crimson hood tipped with miniver. Meanwhile, Gringolet was brought into hall, adorned with a scarlet horse-cloth because of the cold, there to be saddled and bridled under the fond eyes of his mistress.

Then Rhosser himself lifted her into the saddle, and the rest of the party being ready, the doors were thrown wide, and she rode out into the snow.

Without, the stars made a starry brightness in the snow. The air was keen as steel. Gringolet sniffed it up, wondering at it. A distant bark spoke to Luned of wide, untrodden spaces and a region new-created, into which she was to ride for the first time. Two of the maids softly sang as the troop rode out into the night:—

"And turns away,
And turns away,
Her tender tears to hide!"

The white spiritual snow exalted Luned's senses. It shone so, that she seemed to be riding upon a carpet of stars. An ecstasy of the night stole upon her heart. She disbelieved in the darkness, upon

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which she commonly shut her eyes. She thought of Efa, then, whom she would see at the Plygain, who had told her there were spirits who, at times of rare peace, came to the earth, and stood at the side of the simple in heart and brought a new life to them. Such a rapture was Mary's, with her new-born babe.

And now the bell of the chapel of Llanfair sounded, nearly a mile away. It began a full hour before the Plygain, as custom was, to guide the folk through the snow and the darkness. The chapel stood under a wooded knoll, two miles nearer Rhôs than the Plâs at Llanfair. But the roads thither to-night were uneasy for the horses, that now and again must plunge into deep drifts, or pick up the track on an open common whose pits and hillocks were smoothed flat till they would cheat even the fox that crossed them nightly.

But the worst came when they reached the forest-side hollow of Llanfair Isa', where four ways parted. The snows there had so changed the place, with a cast on the branches of some trees and a drift in the ditch beneath others, that Elias, who rode first, was at a loss. Some tried one track, some another. Luned, afraid to keep Gringolet standing in the snow, and driven by the cold to adventure on her own account, essayed a lane to the left. The chapel bell appeared to sound from the trees beyond its first turning. As she rode thither (unless one of the lanterns behind her cast a very subtle shadow,

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which took such a shape) she found herself not many paces behind a small animal like a hare. It was possible, she told herself, a hare might be there, bewildered by the snow; and yet as she strained her eyes to decide the point it was gone. But Gringolet started, and snuffed the snow rebelliously, and was refusing to go further, when she heard a whistle.

It was but three notes, but the effect of it upon Gringolet was magical. He gave an amazing bound into the air, and then broke away, scattering the snow in a shower about them, turning a corner, and never relaxing in his gallop till he reached a gate at which a horseman was pressing his horse against the gate-bars and fumbling at the sneck at the other side. As Gringolet galloped up, and stopped dead on his haunches at the gate, the horseman looked up with the sigh of a tired man, glad of any relief. He wore a huntsman's foxskin cap, with a rolled brim of shaggy fur, that came right over his eyes; while the collar of a torn surcoat stuck up under his nose.

He stared hard from out this furry mask at Luned, and then up went his hand, whisking off his huge cap.

"Oh, demoiselle!" he said; "oh, demoiselle! oh, Luned,—Luned of Rhôs!"

What voice was here?

Voice and face and black locks on pale forehead made a magical change in the winter night.

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"Jestyn?" she cried. "Jestyn!" and Gringolet threw up his head and snorted, as he never did save for the elect.

And still she looked, and looked again at him, confounded, trying to make him out in the sombre radiance reflected in the white night—afraid of him, since he was not quite the same she had known; longing to seize his hand, and to kiss it, yes, a thousand times, because out of the night and the wilderness love had brought him—him, Jestyn, who was lost, and was found—back to her.

"Luned!" he said again. "Oh, sweet Maid, sweet Maid of Rhôs, surely you are come out of the stars!"

His voice had the thin, tremulous tone, she thought, of a man rallying himself from an utter cold and weariness. It went to her heart.

She urged Gringolet a pace nearer, and drawing off her furred glove, held out her warm hand across the bars of the gate.

He seized it, kissed it, yes, a thousand times—or so it seemed—and drew her nearer.

"Oh, Jestyn *back*," she said then, and there was a world of smouldering emotion in the one added word that cannot be rendered in any other tongue but that she spoke.

"It was the whistle brought us to you. But where—where are you come from? This is no road from anywhere? Cold—how cold you are!"

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He laughed. "I was like to be lost on this no-man's road, in this eternal tangle of trees. But now I have found a wondrous fire in the very pit of the snow. Oh, hold my hand yet a moment, only a moment, that I may know 'tis truly you."

But Luned heard calling voices, and saw a lantern gleam through the trees. "Put on your cap and put on my glove," she said; "there is a whole troop of our men and maids riding below."

"How do you come riding out this bitter night?"

"Do you not know what night it is? Did you not hear the holy bell?"

"What bell? I know nothing, hear nothing, save your voice—oh, but that warms and that rekindles my frozen veins."

"The bell rings for the Plygain. The chapel of Llanfair lies at the other side of this wood. I marvel you did not hear the bell. Thither we ride from Rhôs to sing the early Christmas carols of the little Holy Babe at the Plygain."

"Oh, blesséd Babe! oh, blesséd, blesséd Plygain!" cried Jestyn.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

JESTYN'S STORY

IT was still long before cockcrow. There was a tramping of horses in the oak-ring outside Rhôs, but it did not sound like the party that had set out. Lowry, tired, had gone to her chamber. But Rhosser kept watch by the hearth with the two hounds, Bran and Abran, who, like two wolves for length and leanness, slept stretched out at his feet.

Roused by the noise without, Bran and Abran started up, exchanging eager glances, as hounds do to whet their eagerness for adventure, then sprang towards the doors, barking, followed by Daniel, the door-keeper. Watching them, Rhosser said to himself, "It must be a stranger. Yet it is not a stranger who comes."

Dan set the doors wide open, and Rhosser shook off the dregs of his drowsiness, and stood up at the chimney-spur. The red wavering flames on the hearth stretched a hospitable track of light over the rushes to the door. Another moment, and the two hounds, that had disappeared into the darkness with-

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out, returned, escorting, to Rhosser's surprise, his daughter, and with her a stranger whose face was all but hid by his foxskin cap and upturned furry collar.

"What Christmas masker is this? Show your face, Furcap!" cried Rhosser.

"Is there a welcome for me this night?"

"Welcome, hearth and ale-cup, meat and drink! —welcome to the house of Rhôs, in the name of Mari and Mari's Blesséd Babe this night!" And Rhosser, going to the table, filled up the silver guest-cup and, putting it to his lips, tasted it, and then proffered it to the stranger. "Health," he cried; "health, friend!"

The stranger uncapped. "Health!" he cried. "Health to Rhosser, and all of Rhosser's house!"

"Oh, *bachgen!*" cried Rhosser, startled beyond words at seeing Jestyn's face. He seized him by the shoulders, when Jestyn had drained the cup, and dragged him to the fire. "You are wet!" he said. "The snow dropped hours ago: how long have you been in the saddle?"

Jestyn told of his wanderings, and how he had wandered miles out of his road, and how the whistle had brought him help.

Then Luned went and summoned Lowry; and if Rhosser had been hearty, she was carried out of herself. She took Jestyn's hands, and embraced him as if he had been the child and prodigal of her own bosom.

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"Why," she cried, "you are cold—cold!"

She drew off his wet garments, and brought ewer and towels to the hearth-side, and brewed a great bowl of *sucan*—that is, a hot draught of milk mixed with wine and honey and butter and spices.

The effect of this cunning cup was irresistible. It affected not only Jestyn, but those who watched him drink it. And Jestyn, from having been silent, began to tell his tale with so impetuous a recollection of the things he had undergone since last he rode away from Rhôs, that Rhosser more than once interrupted him with an expostulatory,—

"Ah now, you dream'd that!"

And in truth, the tale had strange occurrence in it. It had not ended when the carol singers returned, two hours afterwards.

"Where is Malen?" began he. "I owe the wise wife my life. Where is she?"

"She lies in the oak-wood, under the drift," said Rhosser solemnly; and he told of her death.

"Well," said Jestyn, "witch or no, may she sleep sound! She made me a way out of Penfro' walls, ten feet thick, with nothing but a cup of poppied wine and a silk thread. The wine drugged poor Peter, the silk thread dragged me out. They hunted us high and low, up and down. And I sulked in the rocks of Solva two days and nights; and there Malen came again to me and told me I was in danger. 'But go you,' she said, 'to Abereli, and

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get you across to Dinas Moryn. You will lie snug enough there with Iago, till they tire of hunting. Ask for Peter—cockle-picker Peter—at Abereli. He has a coracle!' So to Abereli I went. Name of St. Eli, what a hell-night! It was the same wind overtook the old wise wife in her wanderings. She knew her time was near, too, but, says she, 'I'll first carry news of you to Rhôs, ay, if I step the wind for it.'"

"The wind blew her death-words out of her mouth while she was telling me," said Rhosser. "May the devil give her poor old soul back to her in the wood that she may get into heaven!"

"Quiet, Rhosser!" said Lowry. "What would you say, this holy night?"

But Jestyn continued,—

"When I saw the half-moon that night in a grey cloud, hung in mid-sky like a cut-off death's-head, and the moon like a living eye looking out of the north, I knew there was more than mortal mischief there, and I thought of Howel Farf. But what was it, when a wind came up, in great rattling wafts, out of the south-east, and the sea, that had been still, foamed, screamed and broke, and was torn to pieces? What was it, when the earth under the sands of Abereli shivered, groaned like a hurt beast, and quaked again? And there came a noise in the sky. 'Twas like huntsmen cracking whips, and hounds a-yelping. In truth, salt sea and dry land are at odds

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there. The sea's eating the sand all the while at Abereli. That night, when the sea rose, its waves, grown greedy, leapt upon rock and sand, upon house and tree, like ten thousand demons. Its breakers were over the tops of the houses at Abereli, they broke in upon us where we were gathered. Then went we up to the church, to pray Christ help us; for then we thought the end of all was come.

"While we stood at the church door, a fire like a red furnace came falling out of the sky, and wiped away the moon; and there was a noise like the falling into the sea of many walls and towers. There were women with child died at that noise and that flame and the terror. But the parson of Abereli took us all into the church to pray. When we came out from that praying the storm was still, the night soft and calm like a summer's night. But Peter cries out, as if he were in pain, 'Gwelwch'i!—Dinas Moryn, Dinas Moryn!' And when we looked, Dinas Moryn, the tongue of rock, and the sea-house on the rock—all were gone. The sea was sweeping by there, as if it had always had its top and tide and its highway on that very spot, where my father had lived and been laid in the sand. And the living and the dead, and the house and the tower, wall and chamber, all were gone—gone like a dry leaf in the fury of the fire." . . . .

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CHAPTER XL

THE LAST TUNE

WHEN Jestyn had got so far in his history, while his three listeners sat seeing in the flaming fire only the moving fury of water he had described, and when he was opening his mouth for further news, a noise of horses without told that men and maids were coming back at last from the Plygain, bringing others with them.

As custom was, when the party were dismounted they all stood on the threshold and sang a carol before entering the house.

And this is how that carol goes:—

I.

THE MAIDS SING.

Here come we, with our holly boughs,
The Holy Babe to bring
Across the threshold of this house,
And 'Hail, Babe,' sing.

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II.

THE MEN SING.

Set the mead, and set the bread,—
The white bread and the brown;
And straw to make the Babe a bed,
And sheep's wool for a crown.

III.

THE MAIDS SING.

Set the wine, and set the mead,
The brown bread and the white,
And we will give you all Godspeed
This holy night.

IV.

THE MEN SING.

Now, ere we go to whip the wren,
Come, give us all we say,
And we will come at dawn again,
And give the house good-day.

"We must have them in. Come in, maids! come in, men!" cried Rhosser. "Bring in the boughs, and we will put them up on the wall."

* * * * *

Jestyn had to wait to resume his tale until he went with Luned through the snow to find traces of three stray deer which Elias had seen without the oak-ring that evening.

"What is this I hear about your leaving Rhôs on Ladyday?" asked Jestyn. "And what is this," he asked again, "about your parting with Gringolet?"

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"We thought Rhôs lost," she said, "unless I married Sir Philip. He came to ask it." And she told Jestyn of the part played by his chess.

Jestyn took an impatient stride into deeper snow. 'Come as far as yonder birch with me," he said; 'you love the birch, I know. It was a birch you planted on the grave at Dinas Moryn. Come to the birch-tree; they can see us here from the gate, where the guests are beginning to arrive. Now," said he, as they reached the birch, "sweet Luned of Rhôs, you know how I love you. Do I love you enough to give you up?"

"To give me up?"

"Yes; for, dear heart, I am like to be still poor."

"Oh, Jestyn, Jestyn! Is it because of what happened? For that is what my father said. He loves Rhôs; it is like his very heart, it is. He said I ought to marry the gentleman of Kemes."

"I was going to say, I was very poor unless——"

"Poor—unless? Poor unless, is not poor."

"Unless you were to give me all this slender pipe promised me." So saying, Jestyn, putting his hand into his bosom, drew out the whistle. "See," said he, "there is the dent of Cantington's sword. Save for it, the steel had surely saved me from prison and a world of woe besides; but it hung always near my heart."

"I have thought often on that unhappy slain maid. You were brave to do my bidding. But if I had not

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bidden you she had not died. Was her singing very sweet,—sweeter than any?"

"Sweeter than all save the little pipe's. One song it has of hers on its stops:—

"Seven candles at my head
(*To the damsels, to the damsels*)—

No, thus it goes:—

"Seven candles round my bed,
(*To the damsels, to the damsels*),
Bring the salt, and bring the bread,
(*To her damsels, said the Queen*).

The refrain is the heart of the tune, too . . . So much I can whistle, no more."

"You have learnt the stops, then? 'Tis sweet, 'tis very sweet:—

"*To her damsels, said the Queen.*

What Queen was that?"

"The Queen Gwenhwyfar; she was very beautiful and very wicked, and very unhappy."

"More unhappy than me?"

"Are you unhappy?"

"More wicked than me?"

"You are not wicked."

"More beautiful than—Gringolet?"

"Not so beautiful as Gringolet's mistress!"

And here Jestyn, making bold, fell back upon a simpler language even than that he had been speaking.

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"You see," he said, speaking so softly that not even the birch could have heard, "if you could love me, poor and a coward, you can love me rich!"

"Oh, oh," she said, "perhaps I can, if you can love Gringolet as well as Gringolet's mistress. For he was my first love."

And with that, the lovers began to return as slowly through the deep snow as if they had been walking on daisies, while Jestyn proceeded to unfold the end of his late history, and to open before Luned's eyes a wide demesne of his father's lands in Morganwg and another ranged about Howel Farf's seat at Castle Howel. Howel Farf long ago, when he desired to persuade Jestyn's mother to marry him, on the declared decease of Morgan, had devised his lands at Castle Howel to Jestyn, and at Castle Howel this will was found on his death. Howel Farf, it appeared, was in a degree kind to his little kinswoman; and it may be that his singular hatred to Rhosser apart (which involved even Rhosser's wife, his own half-sister), he had thought to make wrong right by marrying Luned to the son of the only woman he had ever loved, and who, to his bitter mortification, he had at last helped to die. These things, begun under that lucky birch, were continued all the way through the snow to the gate of Rhôs.

There, in truth, the guests were fast arriving. The Lady of Llanfair, in a black robe, on a white palfrey, rode up, attended by the little cleric, and, strange to

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say, by a new page—Prys, otherwise Perrot. She smiled when she saw the two lovers returning through the snow.

She held out a hand to them. "I have heard of your good fortune," she said to Jestyn. "When I saw you from afar stand in the deep snow, and heard you whistle as if it was high June under the birch-trees, I said, There is strange music in that little pipe. . . . And now that Dinas Moryn is gone, and we can build no sea-cloister there, I am to make my House of Peace, it seems, at Llanfair; and at the chapel of Llanfair you two pretty simpletons shall be betrothed—to-morrow, if Rhosser will?"

"Ah," said the little cleric, smiling and shaking his head at Jestyn, "the cold has touched my voice, my son, or I should have to scold. You did not take my advice—see what came of it. I did my best for you at Pembroke; but in vain. But since you are timely returned, let us make of you a new prodigal son. The smoke of Rhôs uncurling over the snow proclaims that the fatted calf is already at the fire."

Boar's head or fatted calf, capon or moor-cock,—when the tide of mead had overflowed the roast meats that day at the Christmas feast, Rhosser rose again in his seat and lifted the horn.

"Health!" he cried. "Drink hail! to every soul in this old wall of Rhôs. Men, you have heard Rhosser and Rhôs are to part at Ladyday. Part they will not. The snow hath brought this luck to

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Rhôs, that here, at my side, sits my little maid, Luned, and here the son, Jestyn, that is to wed the maid. And all the sheep that ran for Rhosser before shall run again. And Rhôs shall be open house, for rascal and cleric, beggar and squire alike, as it ever was in my time and in the old time before me!"

FINIS.

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